ADVANCED TECHNIQUES
for Work Search

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Government of Alberta

Alberta

Career Practitioners:

This workbook was developed to help self-directed adults with experience in the workforce or post-secondary education, improve their work search strategies. If offers detailed information and exercises to help your clients:

- identify their employability skills
- update their work search tools and skills (resumé cover letters, portfolio, information gathering, interview skills, proposals, etc.)
- focus their work search
- find relevant labour market information
- access other work search resources.

For the latest information to help your clients conduct an effective and efficient online job search go to Alberta Work Search Online at **alis.alberta.ca/worksearch**.

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INTRODUCTION

How to use this publication

Advanced Techniques for Work Search takes you through the process involved in a typical work search by providing information, examples and exercises to help you complete each phase.

The publication is arranged in four parts:

- PART ONE: Preparing for Your Work Search will help you identify your skills, accomplishments and work preferences and describe them effectively. It also offers suggestions for identifying and researching potential employers.
- PART TWO: Preparing Your Marketing Tools will help you develop an appropriate presentation for your product (you). It provides guidelines for creating resumés, cover letters and other tools that will show employers you have what they're looking for.
- PART THREE: Preparing for the Interview will show you how to present yourself effectively and create a positive impression when you meet face-to-face with prospective employers.
- PART FOUR: Strategies for Success offers suggestions for dealing with emotional, financial and other challenges related to searching for work.

You don't have to read the publication cover to cover in order to benefit from it. For example, if you already know what skills you have and the kind of work you want, you may decide to begin with Part Two. Or, if you need help dealing with the emotional ups and downs of a typical job loss before starting you work search, you may want to start with Part Four. You may also want to spend more time on some areas and less on others. Use the detailed Table of Contents to access topics and exercises that apply to your work search needs.

To make the most of your time using this publication, you may want to gather the following items before you start:

- a pen or pencil
- lined paper or a notebook
- your resumé, if you have one
- your cover letter, if you have one
- any other work search material you've gathered.

Throughout the publication, you'll find useful websites with further information on a variety of topics, as well as a **Helpful Resources** section.

PART ONE: Preparing for Your Work Search

The information and exercises in Part One will help you:

- identify your skills, accomplishments and work preferences
- gather information about employers and occupations that are a good match for your skills and work preferences
- increase the effectiveness of your work search by networking.

Identifying your skills

A good place to start gathering information about your product (you) is to identify your skills. Like most people, you probably have more skills than you give yourself credit for. Skills are often divided into two categories:

- *work-specific or technical skills*, such as knowing how to use a specific software program, repair a diesel engine or teach a math class
- *employability or transferable skills*, the fundamental, personal and teamwork skills you need to succeed in virtually every work situation.

The following exercises will provide you with the language you can use to describe your skills to potential employers. When you're thinking about skills, don't limit yourself to those you use professionally—include the skills you've acquired through volunteering, managing a household or taking part in recreational, sports or artistic activities. The average person is able to use 500 to 800 skills on a regular basis!

Later, when you put together your resumé and cover letter (Part Two) or prepare for an interview (Part Three), you can refer back to these exercises for descriptive words and phrases.

If you're looking for work that requires work-specific skills you already have, start your skills list with the **Work-specific skills inventory**. If you don't have much work experience or would like to change occupations, start with the **Employability skills inventory**.

Exercise: Work-specific skills inventory

This exercise will help you identify your work-specific or technical skills.

Step 1

In the *Task* column, list all the tasks you perform in your work. The example in this exercise will help you get started.

Step 2

Break down each task into the skills required and list them in the *Skills involved* column.

Be specific—the more detailed the list, the better. If you're having a hard time coming up with skills and descriptions, check out:

- Alberta occupational profiles at **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo** on the Alberta Learning Information Services (ALIS) website or in print at Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres
- job descriptions from your previous work
- resumé books
- job ads in the newspaper or on the Internet.

Step 3

When you've completed the exercise, highlight (or circle) the skills you enjoy using. How you feel about the skills you use at work often influences both your competency and your job satisfaction. For this reason, the skills you enjoy using are often your most marketable skills.

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Task	Skills involved
Example: Repair diesel engine	- know about diesel engine mechanics - use computerized diagnostic equipment - understand and read engine schematics - use precision tools and instruments

For more help identifying your skills, check out the publication *Assessing You: The first step in career planning,* available online at **alis.alberta.ca/publications** or in print at Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres.

Exercise: Employability skills inventory

The Conference Board of Canada surveyed employers to produce a list of employability skills, the critical skills you need to succeed in the workplace. This exercise will help you identify your employability skills.

Step 1

Complete the inventory by checking off all the skills you feel competent using. You don't have to be an expert at a skill to check it off. Include skills you haven't used for a while but could relearn quickly.

Step 2

Highlight (or circle) the checked skills you enjoy using. These are probably the skills you're good at—the transferable skills you should emphasize when writing your resumé and talking to employers.

Personal skills

Maintaining a positive attitude

- ❑ feeling good about yourself—confident that you can make a positive contribution in work, school, family and leisure situations
- ❑ maintaining high ethical standards—dealing with people, problems and situations honestly
- ❑ giving credit where credit is due—recognizing your own and other people's good efforts
- ❑ taking care of your health—eating a balanced diet, getting enough rest and exercise
- ❑ managing addictions—admitting to any addictions you have and getting help or treatment
- ❑ showing interest and initiative by getting involved in existing activities or starting new ones

Being responsible

- ❑ organizing your work site—keeping your work area neat and clean, taking care of tools, materials and equipment
- ❑ anticipating future financial needs, setting financial goals and deciding how you'll manage your money (for example, paying off credit cards at the end of each month, saving, investing)
- ❑ setting goals and priorities to balance your work and personal life
- ❑ following through with time and financial plans and making adjustments when necessary
- ❑ risking, when appropriate—assessing, weighing and managing physical, emotional and financial risk
- ❑ accepting responsibility for your actions and the actions of your group
- ❑ being socially responsible and contributing to your community (for example, obeying laws, volunteering)

Being adaptable

- ❑ working alone or as part of a team
- ❑ working on several tasks or projects at the same time
- ❑ being innovative and resourceful (identifying and suggesting different ways to get work done)
- ❑ accepting change and using it to your advantage
- ❑ accepting feedback and learning from your mistakes
- ❑ coping with uncertainty (making decisions when you're not sure what the outcome will be)

Learning continuously

- ❑ being aware of your personal strengths and areas that need improvement or development
- ❑ setting your own learning goals instead of waiting for someone else to tell you what you should learn
- ❑ identifying and using learning opportunities and sources of learning
- ❑ planning for and achieving learning goals

Working safely

- ❑ being aware of personal and group health and safety practices and procedures and acting accordingly
- ❑ managing stress—knowing the causes of personal and professional stress and coping with demands and pressures

Teamwork skills

Working with others

- ❑ getting along—demonstrating respect for and caring about the feelings of others, being considerate
- ❑ using tact—being discreet and diplomatic, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues

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- ❑ being supportive—helping others with their problems, supporting others' decisions and initiatives
- ❑ accepting authority—being able to work under supervision
- ❑ respecting differences—appreciating diversity, accepting the uniqueness of individuals
- ❑ co-operating with others to accomplish shared goals
- ❑ clarifying the group's goals and objectives when necessary
- ❑ being flexible—respecting and being open to others' opinions and contributions
- ❑ stating opinions—having the confidence and assertiveness to say what you think
- ❑ accepting feedback without becoming angry or overly defensive
- ❑ contributing by sharing information and expertise
- ❑ leading or supporting when appropriate by motivating others to perform well
- ❑ confronting—telling others things they may not want to hear about their behaviour, habits and so on

Participating in projects and tasks

- ❑ doing your part—working to acceptable standards
- ❑ being timely—completing work on time to meet project deadlines, arriving at meetings on time, responding to messages reasonably quickly
- ❑ determining priorities—deciding what's most important and doing that first
- ❑ scheduling—predicting how much time tasks will take, setting time frames for activities
- ❑ initiating—taking the first step, getting things started
- ❑ planning—developing projects or ideas through systematic preparation and deciding in which order and at what time events will occur
- ❑ organizing—co-ordinating the people and resources necessary to put a plan into effect
- ❑ coaching—providing one-to-one or small group assistance to help others achieve a goal
- ❑ providing feedback—accurately describing an individual's work, behaviour, appearance and so on, in a helpful and considerate way
- ❑ making decisions—choosing a course of action and accepting responsibility for the consequences
- ❑ carrying out projects or tasks from start to finish with a clear idea of what you want to achieve
- ❑ selecting and using appropriate tools and technology
- ❑ reviewing how time has been used and making changes that will increase efficiency
- ❑ adapting to changing requirements and information
- ❑ keeping track of how well projects and tasks are progressing and looking for ways to improve

Fundamental skills

Communication

- ❑ reading—getting information from written materials, following written instructions
- ❑ reading and understanding information presented in non-verbal formats (for example, graphs, charts, diagrams)
- ❑ writing—using good grammar to write clear sentences and paragraphs, being able to express yourself and explain things in writing
- ❑ talking—being able to provide information effectively in ordinary settings
- ❑ public speaking—being able to keep the audience's attention while delivering a speech
- ❑ listening—paying attention to what other people say to understand and appreciate their points of view and responding appropriately
- ❑ questioning—deciding what questions to ask to obtain useful information or to help others gain insight
- ❑ explaining—being careful and clear in what you tell people so they understand quickly and easily
- ❑ resolving conflicts—bringing conflicts to successful conclusions
- ❑ persuading—convincing others to do what you want
- ❑ negotiating—bargaining with others to solve a problem or reach an agreement
- ❑ teaching—understanding group dynamics and instructing others
- ❑ chairing meetings—presiding over a group of people who come together for a purpose, listening, speaking, encouraging discussion and following an agenda
- ❑ sharing information by using information and communications technologies (for example, email and voice mail)

Information management

- ❑ following directions—completing tasks as directed
- ❑ maintaining records of inventory, budgets or other information
- ❑ recording—using planners such as calendars and appointment books to keep track of activities
- ❑ organizing information—keeping orderly records (for example, files, binders of information)
- ❑ filing—sorting information into an organized system
- ❑ scheduling—keeping track of projects, timetables, itineraries and so on
- ❑ researching—locating and gathering information using appropriate technology and information systems (for example, computers, library classification systems, Internet search engines)
- ❑ analyzing information—breaking it down to basic elements
- ❑ applying knowledge and skills from one or more disciplines (for example, arts, languages, sciences, technologies, mathematics, social sciences, humanities)

Numerical

- ❑ counting—determining how many items are in a group
- ❑ calculating—using basic arithmetic: adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing
- ❑ measuring—using tools or equipment to determine length, angle, volume or weight
- ❑ estimating—judging the cost or size of things, predicting the outcome of an arithmetic problem before it is calculated, forecasting the cost of products and services
- ❑ budgeting—planning how you will spend money, deciding what to buy, how much to spend or how to get the work done most cost-effectively
- ❑ deciding what needs to be measured or calculated
- ❑ observing and recording data using appropriate methods, tools and technology

Thinking and problem-solving

- ❑ assessing situations and identifying problems
- ❑ seeking different points of view and evaluating them based on facts
- ❑ recognizing that there are often several aspects to problems (for example, human, technical, scientific)
- ❑ investigating—gathering information in an organized way to determine facts or principles
- ❑ analyzing—breaking concepts or problems into parts so each part can be examined
- ❑ being creative and innovative in exploring possible solutions
- ❑ using scientific, technological and mathematical ways of thinking to gain and share knowledge, solve problems and make decisions
- ❑ evaluating solutions to make recommendations or decisions
- ❑ synthesizing—putting facts and ideas together in new and creative ways, finding new ways to look at problems and do things
- ❑ acting on your conclusions
- ❑ checking to see if a solution works and taking opportunities to improve on it

This employability skills inventory is based on *Employability Skills 2000+* brochure 2000 E/F (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2000). For more information, visit their website at **www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education** and click on *Learning Tools*.

Exercise: Describing your skills

This exercise will help you to further define your skills and describe them in ways that reflect the details of your own experience. Clear, specific descriptions of your skills are the building blocks for effective resumés and impressive job interviews.

Step 1

Create a personalized list of skills you enjoy using by translating the items you highlighted (or circled) in the two previous exercises into words that describe your skills more specifically and accurately. The **Descriptive word list** that follows is intended to give you some ideas but don't limit yourself to just these words!

Step 2

Use the space provided under *My skills* to record your personalized list of work-specific and employability skills.

Step 3

For each skill you add to your list, ask yourself the questions journalists ask: who, what, when, where, why and how. Use the answers to describe each of your skills as accurately as possible. For example, if you write down the skill *teaching*, ask yourself **who** you teach, **what** you teach, **where** you teach, **when** you teach, **why** you teach and **how** you teach. You might say, "I teach weekly adult vegetarian cooking classes through a continuing education program in Big City, Alberta, to help people incorporate healthy vegetarian choices into their diets."

Someone else might say, "I referee basketball games at the local gym so young people have a place to go other than the streets" or "I mentor younger employees on developing leadership and management skills to help them get ahead and to benefit our organization's succession planning at the same time."

My skills	**Who, what, when, where, why and how?**

Descriptive word list

Personal skills
accepting
accurate
active
adaptable
adventurous
affectionate
alert
ambitious
amiable
analytical
articulate
assertive
attractive
broad-minded
businesslike
calm
capable
careful
caring
cautious
charismatic
charitable
charming
cheerful
clever
committed
compassionate
competent
competitive
confident
congenial
conscientious
conservative
considerate
consistent
constructive
co-operative
courageous
creative
curious
daring
decisive
dedicated
dependable
determined
disciplined
discreet
distinctive
dynamic
easygoing
efficient
empathetic
encouraging
energetic
entertaining
enthusiastic
expressive
fair-minded
flexible
forceful
formal
frank
friendly
gentle
generous
genuine
good-natured
graceful
happy
hard-working
healthy
helpful
honest
humorous
imaginative
independent
industrious
informal
innovative
insightful
intelligent
introspective
intuitive
kind
knowledgeable
lighthearted
likable
logical
loving
loyal
mature
meticulous
modest
motivated
objective
obliging
open-minded
optimistic
orderly
organized
original
outgoing
patient
people-oriented
perceptive
persistent
persuasive
pleasant
poised
positive
practical
precise
productive
professional
progressive
prudent
punctual
quick
quick-witted
quiet
rational
realistic
reassuring
receptive
reliable
resourceful
responsible
responsive
self-aware
self-confident
self-reliant
sensitive
serious
service-oriented
sincere
skilful
smart
sociable
sophisticated
spontaneous
stable
steady
stimulating
strong
supportive
sympathetic
systematic
tactful
talented
thorough
thoughtful
tolerant
trusting
trustworthy
truthful
unique
unpretentious
versatile
vigorous
warm

Teamwork skills
administering
assisting
coaching
conducting
consulting
controlling
co-operating
co-ordinating
counselling
deciding
demonstrating
directing
enforcing
facilitating
helping
influencing
initiating
inspiring
instructing
leading
managing
motivating
negotiating
planning
recognizing
reinforcing
rewarding
serving
starting
supervising
teaching
training

Fundamental skills
advising
analyzing
arranging
assessing
budgeting
calculating
checking
communicating
creating
designing
developing
devising
evaluating
generating
improvising
inspecting
interpreting
inventing
investigating
memorizing
negotiating
ordering
organizing
originating
performing
persuading
predicting
presenting
producing
promoting
reading
researching
reviewing
scheduling
selecting
summarizing
synthesizing
talking
translating
verifying
writing

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When you've completed the exercises up to this point, you'll have descriptive lists of your skills. In the next step of your research, you'll take a close look at your accomplishments.

Recognizing your accomplishments

Prospective employers often base their assessment of your future performance on your past performance, which is usually measured by your accomplishments. As a result, describing your accomplishments effectively, both on paper and in person, is a vital step in marketing yourself.

What are your accomplishments? They're the activities that have given you pleasure, fulfillment and a feeling of success. Whether they're large or small, routine or extraordinary, your accomplishments represent you at your best.

You may find it harder to remember your work-related accomplishments than your personal ones—after all, work-related accomplishments are part of your job and you may not have been specifically recognized for them. Whether or not an employer recognized a particular accomplishment (for example, in a performance review), if *you* feel it was significant, then it probably was.

On the other hand, since you might also take for granted activities or experience that other people consider significant, you may also want to ask family and friends to help you identify your accomplishments.

Recognizing and describing your accomplishments will help you:

- boost your confidence
- remember the results you've achieved
- develop outstanding resumés and cover letters
- prepare for job interviews
- target your work search.

Use the exercises in this section to help you identify and describe your accomplishments. You'll be able to refer back to these exercises when you write your resumé and cover letter (Part Two) and prepare for an interview (Part Three).

TIP

To identify your accomplishments, ask yourself...

- What am I most proud of?
- What do I do better than my co-workers?
- What would my former employer(s) miss most about me?

Example: Accomplishment statements

Employers want to know the specifics of your accomplishments. The bold words in the list below are examples of quantifiable (numbers, dollars, time) or proven (promotion, award) words that strengthen an accomplishment statement:

- **doubled** sales from **$50,000** to **$100,000** within **two** years
- achieved savings of **$70,000** through volume discounts and central co-ordination
- **promoted** from Marketing **Co-ordinator** to Marketing **Manager**
- **received** Employee of the Year **award** for exceptional performance
- answered **20** customer service phone calls per day, troubleshooting problems, cutting red tape and making special arrangements resulting in repeat business
- no sick days reported over a **three-year** period
- commended for **error-free** work
- maintained accurate bookkeeping records and reduced outstanding accounts by **10 per cent**
- organized a neighbourhood garage sale raising **$15,000** for a local library.
- achieved **first class honours standing** throughout post-secondary studies.

Exercise: Identifying your accomplishments

This exercise will help you to recognize your own accomplishments.

Step 1

Read through the following questions. Think about how they relate to your own experience. Check off questions that remind you of something you've accomplished. Include a brief note describing the accomplishment. Add other accomplishments to the list in the space provided.

If a question doesn't relate to your experience, go on to the next one. If you're feeling overwhelmed, think about your accomplishments during the last five or 10 years.

Step 2

When you've finished working through the list, see if you can combine some of your notes into one accomplishment that paints a detailed picture of what you did. For example, "managed changeover to new accounting system successfully—resulted in only eight non-operational hours" and "trained staff on new accounting system" could be combined into "strategically trained staff on new accounting system so that changeover resulted in only eight non-operational hours between shutdown of the old and startup of the new system."

Step 3

Review the accomplishments you've checked off. Highlight or put a star beside three to 10 of your most significant accomplishments.

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Employment accomplishments

- ❑ Have you been asked by supervisors to do tasks that you perform better than your co-workers? Explain.
- ❑ Have you been asked to train co-workers? How many and under what circumstances?
- ❑ What recognition, awards or bonuses have you received and why?
- ❑ Have you saved your organization money, time or resources? Explain how.
- ❑ Have you been recognized for perfect attendance?
- ❑ What goals have you exceeded? How and by how much?
- ❑ Have you ever served in a leadership or senior position, either temporarily or permanently?
- ❑ Have you ever taken on responsibilities beyond those in your job description? What were the results?
- ❑ Have you ever simplified a procedure that made the job easier or more cost-effective? Explain.
- ❑ Have you ever been involved in developing, implementing or maintaining a new system? Explain.
- ❑ How have you increased customer satisfaction?
- ❑ Have you ever been involved in hiring decisions?

❑ What projects have you led? What were the results?

❑ Have you ever been asked to write policy or procedures or contribute to research? What were the results?

❑ Have you organized employee or company activities or functions?

Add any other employment accomplishments here:

Personal accomplishments in the workplace

❑ Have you ever volunteered for special assignments or extra duties?

❑ Have you mentored, coached or helped co-workers?

❑ Are you good at motivating or persuading others? Describe.

❑ Are you good at multi-tasking or meeting tight deadlines? Explain.

❑ Have you ever been made responsible for money or confidential material beyond those responsibilities outlined in your job description?

❑ How have your flexibility and adaptability contributed to an organization's success?

❑ Have your peers ever chosen you to represent them?

❑ How have you enhanced the image of organizations you've worked for?

❑ Have you ever been asked to mediate a conflict?

Add any other personal accomplishments here:

Education and training

❑ What specific knowledge or skills related to your field make you a valuable employee?

❑ In what areas of your field have you improved your skills through your own initiative?

Add any other education and training accomplishments here:

Volunteer/community

❑ What community groups do you participate in? Do you hold a volunteer or board position?

❑ What community projects have you organized or played a key role in? What was the outcome?

❑ Have you received any awards or recognition for contributions to your community? Describe.

Add any other volunteer/community accomplishments here:

Exercise: Analyzing your accomplishments—STARS

This exercise will help you analyze the accomplishments you identified.

It takes you through the steps of describing each accomplishment using the STARS storytelling technique. This technique allows you to clearly articulate what you did and the results you achieved by describing your accomplishment in the following way:

Situation	Describe the circumstances and the problem you faced.
Task	Explain what you needed to do, why you needed to do it and the challenges involved.
Action	Describe the actions you took.
Results	Explain what happened as a result of your efforts.
Skills	Describe the skills you used to accomplish what you did.

By completing this exercise now, you'll be preparing accomplishment statements to include in resumés and cover letters (Part Two). The exercise is also excellent preparation for interviews, particularly behaviour-descriptive interviews, in which you need to be able to describe the details of your accomplishments concisely and convincingly (Part Three).

Step 1

Photocopy the following **Accomplishment analysis worksheet**. You'll need to make a copy for each of the three to 10 most significant accomplishments you identified in the previous exercise.

Step 2

Read the example that follows to help you get started.

Step 3

Using the prompts and the space provided in the worksheet, create a STARS summary for each of the three to 10 most significant accomplishments you identified in the exercise **Identifying your accomplishments**.

Example: Accomplishment #1

Situation:

The processing time of orders was taking too long between receiving the order and shipping it. Orders were getting backlogged, customers were complaining and the backlog was creating overtime problems in the shipping area.

Task:

As department assistant manager, I needed to increase phone ordering efficiency and reduce overtime. Since the problem involved two different staff units and ordering systems (both online and phone), it presented logistical and communication challenges. I initiated a review of the phone order system.

Action:

Monitored, compiled and analyzed data on order times and shipping backlogs, solicited staff input, researched alternative ordering systems, presented findings and recommended solutions to management group and organized staff training on new system. Managed new system start-up.

Results:

Combining phone and online ordering systems resulted in a two day reduction in phone order placement-to-shipping time and a 20 per cent reduction in overtime for shipping staff.

Skills:

Organizational, communication, analysis, problem-solving, troubleshooting and technical skills.

[Accomplishment analysis worksheet

Accomplishment # ___

Situation:

(Describe the problem you faced.)

Task:

(Describe what you needed to do to deal with the challenge or overcome the obstacles.)

Action:

(Describe the actions you took. Use active verbs—refer to the **Active verbs** list in **Words for your resumé** (Part Two) for ideas.)

Results:

(Explain what happened as a result of your actions—benefits to the organization, customers, co-workers—in quantifiable or measurable terms such as dollars saved, per cent improvement or promotions, awards or commendations received.)

Skills:

(Describe the skills you used to achieve the results.)

Exercise: Summarizing your accomplishments

Accomplishment statements used in resumés and cover letters often have the greatest impact when they're condensed to three lines or less. Each accomplishment statement should be a summary of a STARS description and should begin with an active verb.

Use this exercise to condense the descriptions of your accomplishments from the **Analyzing your accomplishments—STARS** exercise into summary statements.

Examples:

- Implemented customer feedback system that resulted in a 20 per cent increase in customer satisfaction ratings.
- Strengthened team performance by introducing a series of team-building events. Formally commended by vice-president.

1.

2.

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10.

Now that you've identified your skills and your accomplishments, the next step is to identify the things you want, need and prefer in your working situation.

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✔ Understanding your workplace preferences

To *get* what you want, you have to *know* what you want. Some wants may be an obvious need, such as a minimum level of income. Other wants may not be as obvious.

To get a clear picture of what you want, you need to answer this question: Why are some jobs more appealing than others? This section will help you answer this question by identifying your:

- workplace wants and needs
- preferred work culture
- preferred management style.

[Exercise: Your workplace needs and wants

To feel fulfilled you must satisfy your needs. If you can't satisfy them through your paid work, you will have to look for other ways to satisfy them. Wants are desires, not essential needs. This exercise will help you separate your needs from your wants and prioritize them.

Some items in the following list, such as geographical location or hours of work, are *external values*. If a work opportunity doesn't match these needs or wants, you'll probably find the workplace to be less than ideal. However, matching these preferences doesn't guarantee you'll be satisfied with the work itself: work you dislike doesn't suddenly become more enjoyable if you get a pay raise.

Other items in the list, such as recognition or status, are *internal values* that influence your feelings of job satisfaction. The better the match between your internal values and your work, the happier you'll be. Since you spend a great deal of time at work, your level of job satisfaction has a big impact on how good you feel about your life as a whole.

TIP

Trying to decide between two or three potential jobs? Use **Your workplace needs and wants** exercise to determine how well each one reflects your preferences.

Step 1

For each item on the following list, think about what you must have, what would be nice to have and what you don't want based on your work and life experiences to date and add that to the appropriate column. Use the additional space provided to add any other items that are important to you. Be as specific as possible. If you find it hard to identify what you need or want, begin by describing what you don't want. For example, if you don't want to work in a downtown office tower, what kind of environment do you want to work in? Outdoors? In a small industrial park?

Step 2

Realize that each statement you add under the *Don't want* and *Must have* columns limits the number of work opportunities open to you. Review your responses and ask yourself if you're limiting your search unnecessarily. For example:

- If you said you don't want to work for less than a certain amount, do you really need that level of income? Are there ways you could cut back on your spending?
- If you were offered a job that has health care and pension benefits, would you be willing to accept a lower rate of pay?
- If relocating could dramatically increase your chances of finding work, are you willing to move to find suitable employment?

Step 3

Consider the relative importance of each item you listed under *Must have* and *Nice to have*. Which are deal breakers and which ones could you compromise? The clearer you are about your priorities, the better prepared you'll be to assess potential work situations and target your work search. Check off your 10 most important items.

Step 4

Rank the items you've checked off in order of importance. Add this information to **My ideal work situation worksheet** found later in this section.

	Must have	Nice to have	Don't want
Geographic location			
Indoors/outdoors			
Stimulating environment			
Hours of work (for example, working standard weekday hours, shifts, overtime)			
Pay			
Job security			
Size and type of organization			
Equipment/tools/furniture			
Working with others or alone			
Direct supervision/ independence			
Vacations and other benefits			

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	Must have	Nice to have	Don't want
Nature of the work			
Challenge			
Adventure			
Travel			
Variety in the job			
Being part of a team			
A sense of accomplishment			
Opportunities to learn and/or advance			
Level of responsibilities			
Input into decision-making			
Recognition			

	Must have	Nice to have	Don't want
Status and respect			
Opportunities to influence or coach others			
Time for self or family			
Opportunity to contribute to society			
Opportunity to supervise others			
Influence over policy			
Creativity			
Social relationships			
Working with my mind			
Working with my hands			
Other:			

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Now that you know your workplace wants and needs, the next two exercises will help you determine the work culture and management style you prefer.

Exercise: Your preferred work culture

Every organization has its own work culture. If your values and beliefs are compatible with values and beliefs held by most people in an organization, you're more likely to enjoy working there.

The following exercise will help you identify characteristics to look for in potential employers.

Step 1

Read each statement in the list below. Put a check in the column that applies to you.

Step 2

Review the statements you checked off as *very important*. Rank these statements in order of their importance to you.

Step 3

Add this information to **My ideal work situation worksheet.**

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
The organization's mission is clearly understood by all employees.	❑	❑	❑
Employees have a strong sense of loyalty to the organization.	❑	❑	❑
The organization does what it says it will do.	❑	❑	❑
Employees consistently interact in positive ways.	❑	❑	❑
The organization balances its needs with employees' needs.	❑	❑	❑
Management practices are consistent and predictable.	❑	❑	❑
The organization supports and develops good leaders.	❑	❑	❑
The organization is able to retain good people.	❑	❑	❑
Developmental feedback is provided at all levels of the organization.	❑	❑	❑
Creativity and innovation are rewarded.	❑	❑	❑
People are treated fairly and with respect.	❑	❑	❑
The organization encourages employee input.	❑	❑	❑
The organization follows up and responds to employee input.	❑	❑	❑
The organization treats employees as its greatest asset.	❑	❑	❑
Physical facilities are attractive and conducive to productivity.	❑	❑	❑
Salaries are compatible with levels of responsibility.	❑	❑	❑
Salaries are consistent with the marketplace.	❑	❑	❑
Employment and compensation practices demonstrate equal opportunity.	❑	❑	❑
Fringe benefits are comparable to other organizations' benefits.	❑	❑	❑
Individual contributions are recognized (pay for performance).	❑	❑	❑
The organization is committed to employee development.	❑	❑	❑

Exercise: Your preferred management style

A good working relationship with your supervisor is essential for job satisfaction and career advancement. This exercise will help you identify characteristics to look for in potential supervisors and managers.

Step 1

Read each statement below. Check the box in the column that applies to you.

Step 2

Review the statements you checked as *very important*. Rank these statements in order of their importance to you.

Step 3

Add this information to **My ideal work situation worksheet.**

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
I work most effectively for a supervisor who:			
treats everyone fairly	❑	❑	❑
is technically knowledgeable and competent	❑	❑	❑
delegates work, clearly stating objectives and timelines	❑	❑	❑
delegates the necessary authority as well as responsibility	❑	❑	❑
gives me a fair degree of control and autonomy	❑	❑	❑
provides necessary training and development	❑	❑	❑
encourages creativity	❑	❑	❑
is available when I need to discuss a problem	❑	❑	❑
is decisive	❑	❑	❑
gives credit for good work	❑	❑	❑
provides regular, constructive feedback	❑	❑	❑
supports staff when appropriate	❑	❑	❑
is friendly and acknowledges team members daily	❑	❑	❑
criticizes the behaviour, not me, if my performance is a problem	❑	❑	❑
has realistic expectations of me	❑	❑	❑
keeps the team informed of the organization's challenges and expectations	❑	❑	❑
approaches goal-setting as a shared process	❑	❑	❑
compensates team members fairly and equitably	❑	❑	❑
holds regular performance reviews	❑	❑	❑
fosters my career development	❑	❑	❑
helps me learn from my mistakes	❑	❑	❑
is a positive role model	❑	❑	❑
is an inspiring coach	❑	❑	❑
is honest	❑	❑	❑
has integrity.	❑	❑	❑

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My ideal work situation worksheet

Compile the important details you've identified from the three previous exercises onto this summary page. Use this detailed information when you assess potential employers. If the organization offers all or most of the items on your list, you'll know that it's likely a good fit for you.

My workplace needs and wants

My preferred work culture

My preferred management style

This description of your ideal work situation should give you a clear picture of the kind of workplace in which you would thrive. This information will be helpful in the next phase of your work search—finding employers you'd like to work for.

Do you need to do some career planning?

If you've had trouble identifying your skills and accomplishments or determining your workplace wants and priorities, you may need to do some career planning before you're ready to start looking for work:

- To talk to a career advisor, call the Career Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-661-3753 (in Edmonton, call 780-422-4266).
- To talk to a career and employment consultant in person, visit the nearest Alberta Employment and Immigration service centre. To find your nearest service centre, call the Career Information Hotline.
- Download or order the publications *Career Planner: Choosing an occupation* or *Assessing You: The first step in career planning* online from the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**.

Finding work opportunities and the employers you'd like to work for

Now that you have a good understanding of your skills and accomplishments and a clear idea of what you need and want from a workplace, it's time to move on to the next phase of your work search: finding the employers who need your skills and fit your preferences.

You probably already have some ideas about potential employers you might like to work for. Research will help you gather more information about these and other employers, generate leads and target your work search.

This section will help you research and connect with potential employers by:

- gathering information
- using the Internet effectively
- networking
- information interviewing.

Gathering information

This section suggests a number of ways to identify potential employers and find out more about them.

News articles (in print and online), news broadcasts and documentaries

These sources offer plenty of information about:

- your local labour market
- what's happening in other locations (if you're willing to relocate for employment)
- how conditions are expected to change in the foreseeable future.

News stories can be mined for labour market information. For example, when you see an article about a company developing a new product, think about the effects this could have on the local labour market:

- The company might soon be looking for people to help produce, distribute and sell its new product, needing, for example, production line workers, warehousing technicians and sales representatives.
- If the company is expanding, it may also be looking for other types of workers, including administrative assistants, accountants, business management consultants, network administrators and purchasing agents.
- Producing the new product will require raw materials. This may mean that local suppliers and distributors could also be expanding their workforces in the near future.

Even weather stories can be a source of employment-related information. For example, when a hailstorm hit, an unemployed auto mechanic approached a large, established firm and proposed an aggressive program promoting the firm's quality bodywork and fast turnaround time to people with hail-damaged vehicles. He increased sales for the company and created a job for himself.

Classified and career ads (in print and online)

You can use current classified and career ads to target employers in your field who may have unadvertised job openings in other areas. Use the contact information in the ad to send an unsolicited resumé with an introductory cover letter (see Part Two).

Although useful for identifying potential employers and job leads, classified and career ads have some disadvantages:

- Since most people use classified job ads to find work, competition for these positions is often keen.
- Unless there's a specified competition deadline, advertised positions fill very quickly (often within 24 hours).
- Not all employers advertise positions. Many choose to fill positions through walk-ins, referrals or from within the company.

Telephone and business or industry directories (in print and online)

These directories provide a list of employers in a particular location.

In a telephone directory, use the blue pages and the business pages index to identify potential employers. For example, a social worker might look in the business pages index under categories such as social service organizations, social workers and hospitals, as well as in the blue pages for a list of relevant government agencies.

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You can locate an online business or industry directory by conducting an online search or by visiting **www.411.ca**. Your local library or Alberta Employment and Immigration service centre may also have print copies of these directories.

Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres

These centres, located throughout the province, provide a variety of career and employment services. Some centres offer workshops on work search methods and employment issues or provide employer corners where employers actively recruit workers. Service centre staff can provide information on occupations, career options, educational programs and funding and help you with your work search. Many centres are equipped with computers for Internet use and word processing and phones, fax machines and photocopiers for work search purposes.

To find your nearest service centre, call the Career Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-661-3753 (in Edmonton, call 780-422-4266) or visit **alis.alberta.ca** and click on Career Services Near You.

Your local public library

Libraries provide many work search resources, including:

- directories of community services, businesses and manufacturing firms. These list employers, often by region, and include contact information (mailing addresses, telephone numbers and website addresses). Some directories also provide a description of each organization's services and products as well as key contacts.
- labour market information published by federal, provincial and/or local government agencies (e.g. Statistics Canada, provincial and municipal economic development departments)
- information published by local chambers of commerce and other business and professional organizations
- computers with Internet access
- online resources such as databases, directories, newspapers and industry magazines
- annual reports for major employers in your area.

Job fairs

Job fairs are a growing trend in Alberta as employers look for different ways to attract and recruit staff. Often hosted by educational institutions, industry groups or major corporations, job fairs let you check out a number of potential employers at the same venue (larger corporations may hold their own job fair or open house). You can gather useful information and get a feel for an organization by viewing the display and talking with the staff. You may also be able to submit your resumé or apply for a position. Watch for job fair ads posted at Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres or in the business section of local newspapers.

Employment/placement agencies

Private *employment agencies* are contracted by employers to find candidates to fill specific positions. Sometimes, newspaper ads and online postings tell job seekers to submit their resumés directly to this kind of agency. Keep in mind that it's not the agency's job to find work for you but to recruit for the employer, who is their client.

You may decide to submit your resumé to a *placement agency* that specializes in placing people who have qualifications similar to yours (for example, business administration or engineering design), either for a specific position or to be kept on file for future openings, especially if you know that your targeted employers use this service. If your qualifications fit a position the agency is trying to fill, they will contact you.

Given the amount of free work search help and information available, it's probably wise to be cautious of agencies who ask for payment to help you with your work search. Before you sign an agreement with any agency, read it carefully and be sure you understand the terms.

Depending on the industry and the kind of work you're interested in, contacting an agency can be a useful strategy. Just make sure it's only one of several strategies you pursue. Continue to use the other methods described in this section as you look for work.

Using the Internet

The Internet has become an indispensable work search tool. Every day, thousands of job seekers research potential employers, network, post their resumés and apply for work online.

How much time or effort should you put into an online work search? Consider the following:

- Jobs posted on the Internet are among the 20 per cent of advertised job openings, which means there's lots of competition for these jobs.
- Posting your resumé on numerous job sites, blasting (mass emailing) your resumé to a number of employers or spending hours surfing for work search tips may give you the illusion that you've accomplished a lot when, ultimately, these approaches alone are unlikely to get you an interview.

Conducting an online work search is only one of several strategies that will help you land a job. Like other work search tools, the Internet's effectiveness depends on how you use it. The following suggestions will help you make the most of your work search online.

Access a computer

To begin your work search online, you need a computer with Internet access. And, unless you're searching for a position within your organization, using your employer's computer to search for work online is just as inappropriate as using company stationery for your resumé. Besides being possible grounds for dismissal, by using your work computer you risk alerting your employer that you're actively searching for a new job.

If you don't have your own computer or if you're unfamiliar with the Internet, most Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres and public libraries offer free Internet access. Staff in both locations can help you become comfortable with using the Internet. If you use Internet cafés, keep in mind that you'll have to pay for the time you're online.

Create a work search email account

There are several reasons you need an email account dedicated to your work search:

- Job search websites and networking sites often require you to sign on with a user name and an email address in order to access their full range of services.
- You'll need to provide an email address when you apply directly to employers' or recruiters' websites.
- Using your work email for your online work search is unprofessional and unwise; so is accessing your private email from your computer at work.
- If other family members have access to your home email address, you risk losing important messages. (Your home Internet provider can probably set up an additional email address for you.)

Whether you access the Internet from home or from another location, you can set up a free email account with one of dozens of providers. To find a provider, enter "free email" into a search engine. Be sure you read and understand the site's user rules and privacy policy.

If you're using a public or shared computer, choose the highest level of security for your account, one that requires you to sign in with your user name and a password known only by you, every time you use the account. This ensures that your email correspondence can't be read by others who use the same computer.

Name your email account carefully—it will be the professional signature for your work search. If the name you want is not available, most sites will suggest an alternative that includes numbers. However, numbers can cause confusion among addresses (for example smith222 mistaken for smith223) or could be mistaken for your birth date. An address like **psmithprochef@workmail.ca** presents an appropriate image to a potential employer, while **smithgo_oilers@workmail.ca** does not.

Focus your online work search

The following suggestions will help you stay on task while you search for work online:

- **Be specific about the kind of work you're looking for.** Use the information and exercises in parts one and two of this publication to determine your skills and priorities, then develop a list of industry-related keywords, job titles and employers you might like to work for. Enter the items on the list one by one into a search engine to generate leads and links.
- **Be specific about where you want to live and work.** The Internet's reach is global. Narrowing your search by location will save time and effort.
- **To find out more about a potential employer, enter the company's name into a search engine and follow the links.** Your search may direct you to industry-related sites that may then lead you to other potential employers. It may also connect you to a blog (a web log) written by a current employee about everyday work situations and people—sometimes with the organization's blessing, sometimes without. Bear in mind that a blog features one individual's point of view and is unlikely to be objective. Nevertheless, a blog can offer a perspective on an organization that you may not get from the official website.
- **Look for more than just job opportunities on employers' websites.** Thoroughly explore the sites of employers you want to work for. Press releases, annual reports, mission statements, awards, product and service profiles, names and emails of key contacts—you never know what information might generate a job lead, suggest how you should target your resumé or help you answer an interview question. Even the tone and look of the site can tell you a lot about the company's culture and values. A thorough visit to an organization's website may even take the place of an information interview (described later in this section).
- **Seek out professional sites and forums.** Industry, professional and alumni association sites can be sources for job postings, leads and links to potential employers. Industry- and occupation-related listservs (email discussion groups), newsgroups and chat rooms offer an opportunity to keep up with current developments and network with others in your field.
- **Manage your time online.** The Internet is always available. Many job seekers use other work search tools during the week and use the Internet evenings and weekends. Schedule a specific amount of time for each online job search session. If you set a reasonable daily goal—exploring three employer websites, for example—an hour a day might be enough.

Use job search websites wisely

The Internet is teeming with job search websites, where employers list the jobs they have available and job seekers post their resumés. Many sites also offer work search articles and tips. Explore some job search websites by visiting:

- the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at **alis.alberta.ca/jobpostings** to access more than 80 job banks
- **www.jobbank.gc.ca**, a listing of jobs from across Canada
- other popular commercial sites such as **www.monster.ca** and **www.canada.com**.

You can search most sites for job postings by keyword(s), job type or title and location.

Many sites will allow you (and thousands of others!) to post your resumé in hopes of capturing the interest of an employer or recruiter. Keep in mind that every other job seeker with an Internet connection can do the same.

Many job websites offer a *job agent* or *job match* service. When you post your resumé or skills profile, the service updates you regularly by email, alerting you to new postings that fit your qualifications. This kind of service can save you time and money.

If you decide to post your resumé on a job search website, try to edit or alter some of the information every two weeks. This effectively reposts your resumé with the current date and ensures your resumé stays active on the site, since many recruiters search resumés by date posted.

You may also want to use postings on job search websites to identify other potential employers and find additional postings through employer or recruiter websites. An increasing number of employers maintain an active list of job openings, including those not posted on job search websites or in newspapers.

Protect your privacy and identity online

When you post your resumé on a job search website or even send an email, you're leaving electronic footprints that anyone with skill and the inclination can trace. Your current employer may see your resumé on a job site. Programs called spiders can access personal information in your resumé to steal your identity. Using the email address on your posted resumé, job scam operators can make you a fraudulent job offer in an attempt to get your personal information.

Don't let these possible pitfalls stop you from using the Internet in your work search. Instead, take the following precautions to maintain your confidentiality and avoid online identity theft:

- Before you post your resumé, read the job search website's privacy policy. Post only on sites that require a password to access resumés.
- Find out who owns and operates the site. Avoid job search websites that will not let you search job postings unless you post your resumé.
- Some job search websites offer a service that allows you to block access to your resumé from specific visitors, such as your current employer. This service is not foolproof. Sending your resumé directly to potential employers' websites is a better approach. You can also post your resumé without any specific identifiers using a descriptive job title and your work search email address as contact information—for example, Professional Chef with 7 Years' Experience, prochef@workmail.ca. Although not all potential employers will be comfortable with this approach, it's not uncommon in the online environment.
- Never put your Social Insurance Number, driver's licence number, professional registration number or birth date on your resumé. Legitimate employers don't ask for your birth date, Social Insurance Number, bank account number or mother's maiden name when they contact you about a job. Nor do they generally ask you to pay an application fee.
- If an employer you do not recognize approaches you for a job, check it out before you respond. Enter the employer's name in a search engine, visit their website, contact the Better Business Bureau **(www.bbb.org/canada)** or consult a business directory.

[Networking

Networking is possibly the single most important work research tool available. It's estimated that 70 to 80 per cent of jobs are filled by people who heard about the opportunity from someone else or contacted the employer directly to find out if the organization had an opening.

Networking is the process of connecting with all of the people you know and asking them to help you directly or refer you to someone else. Chances are there's someone in your network who can connect you to the kind of opportunity you're looking for.

For more information on networking, check out the tip article *Networking* available at the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website **alis.alberta.ca/tips**

Networking online

Networking online, or e-networking, allows you to contact people you'd likely never meet through traditional networking methods.

Join and participate in listservs, newsgroups and discussion forums related to the industry or employment field you want to work in. Professional associations and alumni organizations may sponsor, or provide links to, e-networking sites. Or you can use a search engine to discover sites in your area of interest. Some of the most effective e-networking sites ask you to become a member of the site by submitting a profile describing your experience and work background. This lets all members search the site for others who share their interests.

For more information on networking online, visit **alis.alberta.ca/tips** and read the tip article *Networking Online*.

You can email online contacts without an introduction as long as their email address is public or posted on a forum or e-networking site. Use the following suggestions to make the most of these contacts:

- Cast a wide net, then choose the contacts you want to continue with. Because you don't have a personal introduction to your e-networking contacts, you may have to reach a large number of people before you identify the ones who will be strong networking partners.
- Always be professional. Although email seems like a casual mode of contact, you are still conducting business. Establish a tone somewhere between a formal business letter and a casual note to a friend. Do not use online acronyms (e.g. TTFN or LOL) or emoticons (typed symbols) in any business email.
- In your first email to a contact, explain how you located or identified the person, what you have in common and your reason for contacting them. For example, "I read your posting on the Champion Chefs site and realized that we're both professionals at mid-point in our careers. You mentioned that you used to work for the Savours Group. I'm thinking of applying for a position with them and wondered if you could tell me something about your experience with this company."

TIP

E-networking etiquette

Many online forums and e-networking sites have rules of conduct for participants. Be sure you read and understand these rules before taking part. It's also a good idea to get a feel for what others are saying before you begin posting your own messages. Always be courteous and professional in your postings.

Exercise: Brainstorming your network

Step 1

Under each of the headings provided, list as many people as you can think of. You'll be asking them for information about occupations, industries and specific employers. You're looking for referrals, support and advice.

Step 2

Highlight the names of those people you feel closest to or most comfortable contacting. Make your first networking calls or emails to them. As your network expands, add new contacts to your list. Use the **Contact tracking worksheet** at the end of this section to keep track of who you've contacted.

Relatives and family friends

Friends and their families

Neighbours

Current and former co-workers

Acquaintances

Parents of children's friends

Professional association members

Community contacts:

- volunteer groups
- community groups or clubs
- religious organizations
- parent associations

Former classmates

Former teachers

Others

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[Information interviewing

Information interviewing is a research tool based on the idea that if you want to find out what it's like working for Company Z, talk to someone who works there. You talk with people you know, as well as those you're referred to.

Before you contact someone for an information interview, decide what kind of information you're looking for. It will probably fall into one of the three following categories:

- *occupational information*—if you're thinking about moving into a different field of work
- *industry information*—if you're planning to target your work search to a specific industry
- *information about a specific employer*—if you want to target a particular company or organization.

TIP

Some people have used information interviewing as a ploy to get in to see employers so they can sell themselves as a potential employee. As a result, some employers refuse to grant information interviews. Don't be discouraged if you run into a few of these employers. If you use information interviewing in a sincere and honest manner, people will welcome your request for information.

Later in this section you'll find three worksheets—**Deciding what questions to ask**, **Developing an information interviewing script** and **Contact tracking**—to help you prepare for your information interviews and keep track of the information you've gathered. You may want to make several copies of each worksheet.

Arranging and conducting an information interview

To prepare for an information interview:

- Prepare your questions. Use the **Deciding what questions to ask worksheet**.
- Prepare a script for each contact you want to interview. Use the **Developing an information interviewing script worksheet**.
- Make initial contact with the person. If you don't know the person, introduce yourself and say who referred you. Use the **Contact tracking worksheet** to keep track of your calls.
- Briefly explain the kind of information you're looking for.
- Ask if the person would be willing to speak with you for 10 or 15 minutes.

Be prepared for one of three answers:

- "Yes, certainly." In this case, try to arrange a face-to-face meeting—an in-person contact makes a more lasting impression than a phone call. If that's not possible, ask to conduct the interview by phone or email.
- "No, I'm sorry." Accept graciously and, if appropriate, ask if the person can recommend someone else for you to talk to.
- "Let's talk over the phone right now." Always have your questions (Use the **Deciding what questions to ask worksheet**) ready when you make your initial call!

Contacting people you know

Begin the information interviewing process with people you know. You may know someone who:

- works for an employer you'd like to work for
- knows about an employer you'd like to work for
- can refer you to someone who works for an employer you'd like to work for.

Start with the people whose names you highlighted in the **Brainstorming your network exercise**. Phone or email several of these people. Tell them that you're looking for work, and ask them for ideas or, if appropriate, conduct an information interview.

Contacting people you don't know

Through networking or other research, you may be referred to people you don't know who can provide you with more information or employers who may be in a position to offer you work.

What's the worst that can happen when you contact people you don't know? They may tell you they can't or don't want to talk with you. What's the best that can happen? You may contact an employer who's hoping to fill a position without all the work and expense of advertising for and screening candidates.

If you're nervous about making calls, practise on the phone or in a role play with your family and friends until you can introduce yourself clearly, calmly and in a professional manner. Your technique will improve with each call you make.

Identifying the right person to talk to

If you're making a cold call (a call to a prospective employer without a referral or a contact name), use these suggestions to help you identify who you should talk to:

- If you're contacting employers in person, call ahead and ask who has hiring authority for your type of work. Typical titles of people with hiring authority include foreman, supervisor, human resources manager or consultant, manager or assistant manager. Find out when this person may be available. When you walk in, ask for the person by name.
- When contacting employers by phone, ask for the name of the person who has hiring authority. If the person who answers is reluctant to put your call through to the appropriate person, call back another day and ask for the hiring authority by name.
- Using "To Whom It May Concern" in letters or email is usually ineffective. If you can't find out by calling the organization directly, locate the names of specific people through your network, on the organization's website or in a business directory.
- You may also want to talk to someone who doesn't have hiring authority, such as an employee of the organization in a position similar to one you're interested in. Explain to the person who answers your call what you'd like to do and ask to speak with someone who can answer your questions.

When contacting people, always:

- do your research! Check out the company's published material before you make contact. It's unprofessional and inappropriate to waste your contact's time asking questions that are answered on the company's website, in promotional material or from other sources (e.g. education requirements for an occupation).
- ask for the names of the people you talk to, including receptionists. Write their names down and use them in conversation. If you have to call back, it's helpful to know people's names.
- be polite
- keep your calls and emails short and to the point.

If you're prepared and professional, people will be more likely to tell you what they know and refer you to others who may also be able to help you.

TIP

Tips for successful information interviews:

- Call or arrive on time.
- Take only as much time as you've requested—10 or 15 minutes should be long enough.
- When you make contact in person or by phone, make sure you have your script and a copy of your cover letter and resumé in front of you. (See Part Two for help preparing a cover letter and resumé.)
- Dress appropriately even when you make contact by phone. When you dress professionally, you'll sound and act professional. Speak slowly, clearly and relax.
- Take detailed notes.
- Thank the person at the end of the meeting or phone call.
- Always follow up with a thank-you card or email. It will leave a good impression and some of the people you talk to may be in a position to influence future hiring decisions.

Deciding what questions to ask worksheet

To be effective in an information interview, you need to be clear about the kind of information you're seeking. Use this exercise to help you decide what questions to ask.

Step 1

Make several photocopies of this worksheet.

Step 2

For each information interview, highlight the questions you want to ask. Add your own questions in the space provided.

To gather **occupational information**, consider asking the following questions:

- What does this occupation involve on a day-to-day basis?
- What skills does it require?
- What set of values does it reflect?
- How do people enter this field—both the usual and the unusual approaches?
- What do you like and dislike about this occupation?
- Would it be possible for me to job shadow you to learn more about this occupation?

Add your own occupation-related questions here:

To gather **industry information**, consider asking the following questions:

- What kinds of people are attracted to positions in this industry? What are their values? What motivates them?
- What changes and challenges is the industry facing?
- What are the cyclical patterns of this industry?
- What credentials or training programs are most respected within the industry?
- What are the unspoken expectations for people who work in this industry?

- What industry organizations or associations would you recommend? What publications would be helpful to someone interested in this industry?

Add your own industry-related questions here:

To gather **employer-specific information**, consider asking the following questions:

- What are some of the key challenges in your position?
- What qualifications are required for someone to work in this position in your organization?
- What do you like most about your job with this organization?
- What do you like least about your job with this organization?
- How did you find your current job?
- What advice would you give someone who wants to work for this organization?
- Who else do you recommend I talk to about this organization?
- [Ask the following question if you were unable to find this information through your research]: Who does the hiring in your organization?

Add your own employer-specific questions here:

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Developing an information interviewing script worksheet

Use this worksheet to develop a script for each information interview.

Step 1

Make several copies of this worksheet. Your script may be different for each contact.

Date:

Script for (indicate name of contact here):

Briefly introduce yourself. Include some information about your background if appropriate.

Tell the person you're interviewing how you found out about them (e.g. referral, website, job ad, newsletter or other publication, business pages, etc.).

Step 2

Following the prompts, write down what you plan to say. Be brief but specific.

Step 3

Avoid memorizing your script or reading it to your contact word for word. Practise getting your main points across using words that seem natural to you.

If you have any knowledge about the occupation, industry or company, referring to it at this point will catch the contact's attention:

Depending on what you want from the interview, ask for:

- ❑ the information you're looking for, based on the **Deciding what questions to ask worksheet**
- ❑ feedback or advice about your skills or resumé
- ❑ referrals. Ask if you can use the person's name or if you can contact them in future for additional information.
- ❑ other support or information.

Thank the person at the end of the meeting, email or phone call. Note any additional follow-up required.

[Contact tracking worksheet

Make several photocopies of this worksheet. Use it to keep track of who you contacted when and what was said (for example, when you will call them back).

Contact

Name

Organization

Address

Phone

Email

Website address

Date and time of contact

Comments

❑ Resumé sent ❑ Thank-you note or email sent

Other follow up

Contact

Name

Organization

Address

Phone

Email

Website address

Date and time of contact

Comments

❑ Resumé sent ❑ Thank-you note or email sent

Other follow up

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PART TWO: Preparing Your Marketing Tools

In Part Two, you'll create marketing tools that highlight your skills and accomplishments and develop strategies to use these tools effectively. The information and exercises will help you:

- understand how to market yourself effectively
- select the best resumé format
- develop high-impact resumés
- choose references who will support your work search
- write letters and emails that capture an employer's interest
- develop and use other work search marketing tools, such as curricula vitae, portfolios and business cards.

? Thinking about your market

In Part One, you created a list of potential employers who may be a good fit for your skills and work preferences. This section will help you think like those employers in order to determine what they want and demonstrate that you have what they're looking for.

Take a moment to imagine yourself as an employer who needs to fill a position. Before you begin recruiting, you'll decide what kinds of skills and other qualifications the ideal employee will have. You describe these requirements in the job posting.

You may receive hundreds of resumés or applications for the position. Some will meet your requirements; many won't. How do you decide who to interview, never mind who to hire?

[Understanding the selection process

Most employers follow a selection process to compare their requirements with the skills and qualifications of the applicants. Depending on the size and nature of the organization, the employer may be the first person to look at the dozens (and sometimes hundreds) of resumés received in response to the job posting or this task may be assigned to the hiring manager, a recruiting agent or a human resources employee. No matter who this task is assigned to, their job is to screen out as many resumés as possible in order to narrow down the number of applicants who will be evaluated more closely.

Resumés are screened using a set of criteria including the requirements of the job, as well as other needs and preferences the employer has identified. In a large organization this initial screening may be done using computer software that scans application forms and resumés for keywords and phrases reflecting the selection criteria.

Although the exact process is different for each organization, an employer will probably screen applicants by sorting them into three groups:

- A — those who demonstrate that they exceed all the criteria
- B — those who demonstrate that they meet all, or most of, the criteria
- C — those who do not demonstrate that they meet the criteria.

If the employer is looking at dozens of resumés from applicants who have most or all of the necessary criteria, he or she will probably screen resumés by selecting those that:

- are easy to read and error-free, reflecting the applicant's desire to do high-quality work
- clearly highlight the relevant qualifications for the position posted
- describe the relevant qualifications using the same or similar keywords that appear in the job ad or posting or, for unadvertised positions, that are standard in the industry.

Several factors will influence how many candidates will be interviewed, including the time and staff available, the skill level of the position and the number of positions to be filled. Probably only the top eight to 10 candidates from group A will be interviewed. If the position can't be filled from group A, or if the employer wants to keep options open, the most outstanding candidates from group B may also be interviewed.

Now that you understand the screening process from an employer's point of view, how can you ensure that you get called for an interview?

The following section will help you choose the best resumé format, create a master resumé and tailor your resumé to show employers that you meet or exceed their criteria.

Developing high-impact resumés

A well-written resumé is a key element of your work search. It's a one- or two-page summary of your skills, accomplishments, experience and training. Your resumé is a marketing tool you give to a prospective employer in order to:

- make a good first impression
- demonstrate how your skills and accomplishments meet their requirements
- get an interview.

The effectiveness of your resumé will depend on:

- what type of resumé you decide to use
- what information you include and how you organize it
- the words you use, including action verbs, keywords, qualifiers and quantifiers.

Types of resumés

There are three basic resumé types: *chronological*, *functional* and *combination*. The type of resumé you choose will depend on your experience and your work search target. For example, if you're applying for a position that's similar to a current or previous position, a chronological format may be the most effective way to highlight your experience. However, if you're planning to change careers or industries, a functional or a combination resumé will highlight your relevant skills.

The following chart compares the three resumé types.

What type of resumé should you use?

Resumé Type	Advantages	Disadvantages	Use to...
Chronological	• looks most familiar • highlights employment history • can show consistent employment or upward mobility in same field or industry • highlights prior positions, employers	• exposes potential barriers like gaps in employment, frequent job changes, lack of experience or career progress • highlights employment history rather than skills	• highlight a steady work history that relates directly to position applied for • apply for a position in a more traditional field such as teaching or government work
Functional	• emphasizes skills and accomplishments • provides plenty of scope for tailoring to reflect employer's needs • de-emphasizes gaps in employment history and barriers to employment such as little previous experience in a particular field or frequent job changes	• does not appeal to most Canadian employers • highlights skills rather than employment history • requires that you know what skill areas employer would be interested in	• change careers or industry • re-enter the labour market after time away • emphasize strong skills developed in unpaid settings such as volunteer work • seek a permanent position after doing contract or freelance work
Combination	• combines the best features of both the chronological and the functional resumé • highlights skills as well as condensed employment history • provides more flexibility for tailoring than does the chronological format • minimizes potential barriers like gaps in employment and lack of directly related experience	• can be confusing if not well written • de-emphasizes experience with specific employers • may require more time and focus to organize	• balance the emphasis between relevant skills and employment history

Example: Chronological resumé

A chronological resumé highlights your employment background, education and training in reverse chronological order, placing your most recent or current experience first. It includes names of organizations and dates of employment. It highlights key duties you've performed but not how well you've performed them.

Employers often prefer this format because it makes it easier for them to quickly determine if you have the specific combination of education and experience they require, as well as a steady employment history. However, a chronological resumé may not market your skills as well as a combination resumé if you have gaps in employment, no directly related experience or not enough experience.

In the following example, Robert Brown, currently employed as a recreation co-ordinator, is applying for a position as a youth worker in a correctional institution.

To position himself effectively, Robert must deal with the following **challenges**:

- The employer may not realize that his qualifications are relevant.
- He has no related paid experience.
- He anticipates strong competition from experienced applicants and those with related academic qualifications.

Robert also knows that he would bring the following **assets** to the position:

- transferable knowledge, skills and abilities from education, volunteer activities, paid work and life experience
- excellent knowledge of sports and recreational programs that he can use as a way to relate to youth in correctional facilities
- a willingness to live and work in a rural setting, which is a requirement for the job.

Robert decides to use a chronological resumé. How well does he highlight his assets and deal with his challenges?

Chronological resumé

ROBERT BROWN
Box 1700
Urban City, Alberta
T2Z 2Z2
Email: rcbrown@email.ca
Phone: 403-555-7777

Summary of Qualifications

- More than four years of professional experience teaching, coaching and leading youth in both rural and urban settings.
- Bachelor of Education with continued training in youth counselling.
- Work successfully with teens, including young offenders, in one-on-one and group settings.
- Strong communication skills, effective listener.
- Well-developed observational and assessment abilities, with demonstrated supportive counselling techniques.
- Effective leader and organizer of a broad range of sports activities.
- Able to relocate and live in a rural setting.

Education

Bachelor of Education, ABC University 2001

Counselling Youth, certificate course, XYZ Community College 2003

Employment Background

Parks and Recreation Co-ordinator since August 2001
Urban City Recreation Board

- Organized, instructed and supervised youth recreation programs for groups of five to 100 participants.
- Developed and led successful youth outreach programs, currently used by 20 per cent of district teens.
- Initiated and guided teen talk-back group, chosen as alternative sentencing program for young offenders.
- Counselled and provided resources to youth and referred clients to other professionals as required.
- Worked as part of a team of teachers, counsellors, corrections officers, social workers and other professionals to plan and evaluate programs.

Teacher Practicum — January–June 2001
Small City Junior/Senior High School, Small City, Alberta

- Taught Physical Education Grades 7 through 12 and Biology 30, including laboratory work, lectures, group work and field trips. Class sizes of 25 to 34 students.
- Coached soccer and supervised and monitored student behavior on school property.

Range Supervisor — June–August 2000
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

- Supervised data collection for lab- and field-based experimental project.
- Worked independently and used computer software to input data for compilation and analysis.

Certification

CPR—St. John's Ambulance
Canadian Amateur Sport Certification Program:Canadian Soccer Association, Level 3
Canadian Football, Basketball, Gymnastic and Volleyball Associations, Level 1

Brown Belt—World Martial Art Council

Volunteer Activities

Vice-President, Rural District Minor Soccer Association — since 2001

Coach, Alberta Minor Soccer Association — since 1996

Athletic Awards

World Martial Art Council WMAC International Brown Belt Champion — 2000–2002
WMAC division one Conference champion

WMAC Brown Belt World Contender — Ranking issued as of August 1999
until title championship 2000

Award of Excellence—Canadian Soccer Association

References

Available upon request

Analysis

Robert uses a chronological resumé to highlight his employment history, which is steady, and to show the relevant skills he used working with each employer. He highlighted his education by positioning it before his employment history because the job requires a bachelor's degree or college diploma and because he feels his training as a teacher is relevant to working with youth. Robert claims that he has "Worked successfully with teens." Later, he supports this claim with the statement, "Developed and led successful youth outreach programs, currently used by 20 per cent of district teens." He mentions his certifications, sports interests and athletic awards because these are all relevant to the position.

Steven Cordeiro's resumé in **Example: Tailoring your resumé** is also a chronological resumé.

[Example: Functional resumé

A functional resumé highlights your skills or accomplishments (and shows how you've applied your skills) instead of your employment background. It may omit references to past employment or list past employers without including specific duties or dates.

Many Canadian employers aren't familiar with functional resumés and, as a result, may not respond to them favourably. Employers generally like to see specific details about your employment history because it allows them to assess your background more quickly. The lack of dates in a functional resumé can sometimes arouse suspicion.

On the other hand, if a chronological or a combination resumé points to gaps in your past employment, a functional resumé may be your best choice. You may decide to use this type of resumé if:

- you don't have a paid employment background
- you're making a career change
- you've been out of the labour market for a long time—at home raising a family, in a correctional facility, ill or out of the country travelling, for example.

In the following example, Janellen Ali is planning to make a career change. Currently employed as a teacher, she's preparing to move into the field of human resources.

Janellen is applying for an entry-level human resources training position with an organization where relocation to other countries is a possibility. Her **challenge** is that she has no directly related human resources experience and no related degree, although she is currently taking a human resources certification program.

Janellen wants to highlight the following **assets**:

- the ability to speak and write several languages
- extensive life experience
- excellent customer service and interpersonal skills
- a background in teaching and training.

Janellen prepares a functional resumé to apply for this job. How well does it reflect her transferable skills and the assets she would bring to the position?

Functional resumé

Janellen Ali

1653 Success Street, Anywhere, AB T2Z 2Z2
Email: jali@email.ca
Phone: 780-555-9999

Objective

Human Resources position in training and development that will utilize my teaching/training, language and problem-solving skills.

Summary of Qualifications

- Enrolled in human resources management certificate program and have completed majority of courses.
- More than 10 years of teaching/training experience.
- Excellent verbal and written ability in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish.
- Five years of overseas experience—able to empathize and work with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures.
- Proven organizational, planning, leadership and motivational skills.
- Strong listening skills and the ability to deal effectively with people's problems and concerns.

Training / Teaching Skills

Developed, taught and evaluated courses in Spanish, French and Social Studies and a variety of other subjects. Classes ranged in size from five to 40 people from ages six to 70.

- Facilitated classes on new resources and curriculum changes for professional development seminars.

Organizational / Administrative Skills

- Chaired professional development committee, planned and organized activities for professional development seminars.
- Organized and supervised extracurricular sports and cultural events.
- Operated the school bookstore, including recruiting, hiring and supervising 18 students and ordering supplies, managing inventory and promoting sales of products.
- Planned and hosted events, from school events for students, staff and families to district-wide awareness campaigns.
- Strong computer skills in Microsoft Office—able to perform all aspects of accounts payable/receivable.

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Leadership / Teamwork Skills

- Acted as chairperson for school advisory council.
- Advised and mentored student United Nations Club.
- Set up staff career development library with more than 500 publications and videos.
- Participated actively on district professional development committee and planned and organized three professional development conferences.
- Guided and translated for VIPs attending two world-class athletic events.

Education

Currently enrolled in the ABC University Human Resources Management Certificate program.
Completed seven of 10 required courses.

Bachelor of Education with Distinction, XYZ University 1988
Major: Social Sciences
Minor: Modern Languages (French)

Workshops and seminars in the areas of customer service, marketing and instructor training.

References available upon request

Analysis

Janellen uses a functional resumé to focus on her teaching, organizational and leadership/teamwork skills—the skills that would transfer from her previous occupation, teaching, to her targeted occupation, human resources training. Under the Summary section at the top of her resumé, she notes her teaching/training experience as well as the fact that she's currently enrolled in a human resources program. She has chosen to not provide any specifics of her employment history to downplay her lack of direct experience in the human resources field. Janellen is planning to dispel any concerns about this issue with well-chosen answers in an interview.

[Example: Combination resumé

A combination resumé combines elements of the chronological and functional types. It includes chronological background information as well as details about your accomplishments and the skills you've developed. It differs from a chronological resumé in that a skills or achievements section comes before the employment history.

Many people find that a combination resumé is the most effective type because it allows them to both highlight their most relevant qualifications and to include the employment history that most employers expect to see. However, combination resumés can be more challenging to organize and keep to a two-page length.

Combination resumés work well in most situations where you're changing occupations or moving into a field that's similar but not directly related and in situations where you've been working for the same employer for a long time. If you've performed similar functions for a number of different organizations, a combination resumé allows you to group related experiences together.

In the following example, Amy Harden, an environmental technologist, uses a combination resumé to apply for a more senior position in her field.

Amy's **challenge** is to make her resumé stand out among those of other qualified applicants. She realizes that a combination resumé will allow her to avoid repetition, as some of her jobs have involved the same activities. Amy feels her **assets** include her experience and the leadership roles she has taken on.

How successfully does Amy use the combination resumé to highlight her assets and capture the employer's attention?

Combination resumé

AMY HARDEN

1586 Gibraltar Street • Anywhere, Alberta T2Z 2Z2

Email: Amy.Harden@email.ca Phone: 403-555-3333

SUMMARY

More than five years of increasingly responsible experience as an environmental technologist, including field assessment and monitoring in wide range of conditions.

AREAS OF EFFECTIVENESS

Technical Achievement

- Lead technician for a wetland habitat restoration project, which was awarded the Greenfields Scriver Environmental Medal of Merit 2005.

Technical Qualifications

- Standard ecological field methods including operation and maintenance of field equipment, collection and analysis techniques, natural resource assessments and monitoring.
- Experienced in wetland delineation, classification and restoration.
- Detailed knowledge of current environmental regulations.
- GPS/air photo interpretation.
- Extensive laboratory experience.
- CPR and H_2S certification.

Leadership Skills

- Lead technician on award-winning project, cited above.
- Lead technician on eight other successful projects, including the Foster Lake Rehabilitation Project, which was completed 18 months sooner than projected due to the innovative use of biological agents.
- Selected by peers to represent technical staff on Best Practices committee that developed standardized assessment techniques adopted company-wide.
- Organized field plans and staff and equipment assignments for 15 staff members.
- Professional, highly motivated, innovative, thorough and organized.

Communication Skills

- Developed a field-to-lab communication model that reduced turnaround time by 15 per cent.
- Advised senior management through consistent monthly reporting.
- Liaised with lab staff of four to ensure accurate and timely analysis and assessments.
- Prepared and presented weekly field reports for managers and team members.
- Proficient in Microsoft Office, including Excel.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Lead Environmental Technician April 2003 to present
ABC Enviro
- Promoted to lead technician October 2004.
- Identified, assessed, collected and monitored natural resources in the field and correlated data using industry-standard software.
- Managed field equipment, including the purchasing of new equipment and supplies and establishing regular maintenance schedules that resulted in cost savings for the company.

Environmental Technician August 2001 to March 2003
Bio Lab
- Performed standard laboratory procedures including wet chemical analyses of water, soil and air.
- Applied quantitative analysis using a variety of methods, including gas and high performance liquid chromatography.

Herbicide Reclamation Assistant May to September 2000
XYZ Vegetation Control May to September 1999
- Assisted environmental technologist and team in reclamation of 55 well sites and other industrial sites across Alberta.

EDUCATION

Environmental Sciences Diploma 2001
STU Community College
- Awarded Women's Bureau Scholarship.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION

Alberta Society of Biological Technologists

PERSONAL INTERESTS AND HOBBIES

Outdoor activities such as horseback riding, skiing, skating, cycling, camping, running and swimming.

Analysis

The combination resumé allows Amy to lead with an outstanding achievement—the Environmental Medal of Merit—that helps her resumé stand out among those of many other qualified applicants. She is also able to highlight the key skill areas required for the job and use her employment history section to further emphasize her achievements.

The right resumé?

Some of the advice in books about resumé writing may be out of date (particularly on the topic of online work search) or may not apply to your particular situation. Always check the source and date of the resumé writing resources you use. If you're in doubt about what type of resumé to use, talk to an Alberta Employment and Immigration career and employment consultant or someone else who is knowledgeable about current hiring practices and preferences in your target market.

You can also ask the employer directly what type of resumé their organization prefers. Call the organization's main number and ask to speak to the human resources department or the hiring manager for the position you're interested in.

[Curriculum vitae

A curriculum vitae (CV), a longer, more comprehensive document than a resumé, is often used when applying for:

- graduate studies or professional programs
- academic or executive level positions within North America or internationally
- a professional association membership or designation.

Here's how the two compare:

Resumé

- no more than three pages long (two pages is ideal)
- provides a summary of relevant qualifications
- used in most fields of work
- used to quickly screen candidates

Curriculum Vitae

- may be three to 10 pages long
- comprehensive listing of qualifications
- highlights teaching, research, service, awards and publications
- used for academic and higher level positions
- used to study credentials and biographical information

The information you include in a CV depends on whether you are applying within or outside North America. **If you're applying for an academic position within North America**, include the following information:

- name and contact information
- objective
- summary of qualifications
- summary of skills
- education, including degrees, specialization, post-graduate and post-doctoral studies and dissertations
- professional background, including teaching interests and experience, research interests and experience, job titles and employers
- volunteer and public service experience
- research projects, grants (including amount received) or inventions
- published works
- public presentations and appearances
- honours, awards, distinctions and achievements
- professional designations and affiliations.

If you're applying for work outside North America, add the following information:

- personal information considered to be discriminatory in Canada (age and marital status) and personal attributes, with supporting evidence in the form of work-related examples and quotes from employers, co-workers, customers and people who have status and authority (for example, religious leaders, political officials). Add "excellent health" to your personal information if this is true.
- hobbies and leisure activities, especially those that demonstrate your ability to adapt to different cultures.

When you're writing a curriculum vitae, use the same care selecting, organizing and wording your CV as you would when writing a resumé and keep these additional tips in mind:

- If your CV is more than four pages long, include an executive summary at the beginning.
- Have your CV translated if English is not the language of choice where you're applying for work.

If you need more information about preparing a CV, check with the placement office of a university, college or technical institute.

In addition to choosing the resumé type that will most effectively showcase your assets or downplay your weaknesses, you need to decide what information to include in your resumé and how to organize it.

Selecting and organizing information

Lead with your strengths

Human resource and career development professionals say you have between 30 seconds and one minute to grab the attention of someone reading your resumé. Here are some dos and don'ts for producing effective resumés:

- Analyze what the employer is looking for and tailor your resumé to meet the requirements of the job. (See **Example: Tailoring your resumé**.)
- Feature your strongest qualifications in the first part of your resumé.
- If you have the required skills and knowledge but lack the specific academic credential requested, apply anyway. If you present the skills you have effectively, lack of a specific credential may not be a barrier. Lead with your relevant experience and transferable skills. List your education later.
- Avoid providing information that might be used to screen you out. For example, don't include information that you're not required to supply under human rights legislation—age, gender, race, religion, marital status or ethnic background.
- Put your employment dates in the right-hand margin unless you want to emphasize the length of time you have been employed in a particular job. Most employers prefer to see dates at the right hand margin. Use your judgment. For example, if you stayed in one job at the same level for 10 years, employers may wonder why you never advanced. If you've had a series of short-term contract or project positions, say so. Otherwise, employers may think you're unreliable.
- Use your judgment about withholding information. For example, if you have only high school and the employer is asking for a college diploma, de-emphasize your education. Near the end of your resumé, include a statement such as "Education: High School" or "Several courses completed, Marketing, Community College."

Include appropriate contact information

On the first line of your resumé, include only your name and, if applicable, a designation such as BA or P.Eng. On the following lines, include your address and postal code, phone numbers (including area code) for your home phone and cell phone (if you have one) and your work search email address. You may also want

to create an online version of your resumé that does not include most of this personal information. (See **Protect your privacy and identity online** in the **Using the Internet** section in Part One.) Use the following suggestions when adding contact information:

- To maintain confidentiality and professionalism, don't use your work phone or email for your work search.
- Provide a daytime phone number where messages can be left for you. Interviews are usually arranged by phone during office hours.
- Put your name on every page of your resumé. You can use the header or footer function in word processing software to do this.

Use headings to organize your resumé

Select headings that will allow you to organize your resumé in a way that demonstrates you have the skills and accomplishments the potential employer is looking for.

The following are some suggested resumé headings that will come after your contact information, listed in the order in which they usually appear. Review the resumé examples earlier in Part Two to see how headings can be used to organize content.

Job Target, Career Objective, Objective, Job Goal, Goal, Position Applied For

This is a one- or two-line description of the kind of position you're seeking and your strongest qualification for the position. It's optional.

Some human resource professionals feel an objective statement may limit your chances of being considered for a different position with the same employer when you make the short list but don't get the job you apply for. This may be especially significant if an employer maintains an active, internal file of resumés that are circulated to all hiring managers. Other human resource professionals prefer to see an objective statement and expect the rest of your resumé to reflect your goal.

Creating an effective goal or objective statement is tricky. If your objective is too specific, you may limit your opportunities. However, vague statements such as "To obtain a challenging position with a progressive company that will allow me to grow and develop my analytical and problem solving skills" are not likely to grab an employer's attention.

If you're in doubt about whether to include an objective statement in your resumé, you can always create an objective, write your resumé based on it and then leave it off the final draft. Or you can include your objective in your cover letter. In any case, a goal or objective statement, or the lack of one, is unlikely to make or break a clear, well-written resumé.

If you do decide to include an objective statement, focus on what you can do for the employer (e.g. apply your problem-solving skills) rather than on what the employer can do for you (e.g. give you an opportunity to grow and develop). Janellen Ali's objective statement in her functional resumé focuses on what she can do for the employer: "human resources position in training and development that will utilize my teaching/training, language and problem-solving skills." Use your cover letter to explain why you're interested in the job.

Summary, Highlights of Qualifications, Background, Summary of Background, Profile

This is your opportunity to summarize how your qualifications match the job's requirements. Be sure your experience will back up any statements you make. Include:

- the number of years in the relevant occupation
- relevant education and training
- relevant accomplishments
- key skills or specialized knowledge
- personal skills, such as attitudes or work style that support your objective.

Talents, Accomplishments, Achievements, Strengths, Areas of Effectiveness, Professional Attributes, Results Achieved, Skills, Capabilities

This section features the work-related accomplishments you identified when you completed the exercises in Recognizing your accomplishments in Part One. Group skills in sets that reflect the job requirements and include a bulleted list giving details to support each skill set. (See Janellen Ali's and Amy Harden's resumé for examples.)

Use these headings at the beginning of a combination resumé, immediately following your name and address or after a summary if you have one. For screening purposes, employers usually like to see your education and experience first. You can get around listing the details of your experience and education at the top of your resumé by including the highlights in a summary.

Employment, Employment Background, Employment Experience, Employment History, Relevant Work History, Work History, Work Experience[1]

Include your key responsibilities in this section. Use action words that convey your professionalism, expertise, maturity and experience. (Check out the section **Words for your resumé**.) Whether you choose to use past tense or present tense, be consistent. Try to use numbers and descriptive words to help the employer picture how you work and what you've accomplished for other employers.

Experience Highlights, Experience Background, Career Experience, Professional Background, Professional Experience, Relevant Experience

These are ideal headings if you are combining paid and unpaid experience.

Education, Education Background, Education and Training, Education and Development, Educational Development, Post-Secondary Education, Training and Development, Professional Development

List your most recent formal education first. You may also want to include a bulleted list of course titles and dates in any subject areas that are particularly relevant to the job.

Listing numerous seminars and workshops may take up too much space. Instead, combine these under a heading like "Education and Development" and include a statement such as "Workshops and seminars on computer skills, leadership and supervision, including..." Or, highlight one or two subject areas that are particularly relevant to the job and follow with a statement like "Complete list of courses available on request."

If you have a degree, diploma or certificate, don't list your high school diploma, since high school completion is usually the prerequisite for post-secondary admission.

1 Generally associated with entry-level jobs, work experience is a term used for volunteer placements where students have an opportunity to apply classroom knowledge and develop skills. Ensure that your paid employment is not confused with this type of experience.

Volunteer Activities, Community Involvement, Leadership Roles

This section is optional. Job seekers often wonder whether it's appropriate to include volunteer activities on a resumé. Many companies are committed to active participation in the community and strongly encourage employees to volunteer. Including this information may show that you are a well-rounded person and may even help get you the job. Include the activities you think will interest a particular employer. You can also use volunteer activities to demonstrate relevant skills and show experience.

Under human rights legislation, you're not required to name specific organizations you belong to. Avoid identifying your religious or political affiliations unless this is relevant to the employer. Use your best judgment.

Limit this section to one or two lines. It's not necessary to include dates here, although it's fine to do so.

Recreational Activities, Leisure Activities, Interests, Hobbies

Although this section is optional, there are a number of reasons why you may decide to include this information:

- It gives employers a glimpse of you as a whole person, not just your professional self.
- It supplies information that may help the prospective employer make small talk at the beginning of an interview.
- It indicates that you have a balanced lifestyle and recognize the need for recreation and diversion.
- Your recreational and leisure interests may involve knowledge and skills relevant to the job.

Limit this section to two or three lines. Or combine it with a volunteer or community involvement section under a title such as "Community and Leisure Activities."

References

Don't include your references. Most employers don't require this information until you've been shortlisted for the job.

Should you use the phrase "References available upon request" in your resumé? Some human resource and career development professionals note that since employers expect you to provide references anyway, using this phrase is stating the obvious. Others recommend its use. If you're short of space, don't include this phrase.

If an employer specifically asks for references in the job ad or posting, you will need to send them along with your resumé.

Demonstrate your accomplishments

From an employer's point of view, what you've done in the past predicts what you'll do in the future. Employers are more likely to believe your accomplishment statements when you can support or substantiate them:

- Quantify your accomplishments with numbers, per cent figures, dollars and so on wherever possible. (See the **Analysis** sections for Robert Brown's resumé and **Quantifiers and qualifiers** in **Words for your resumé** for more information.)
- Include any awards or recognition you have received. For example, in the **Combination resumé**, Amy Harden highlights her role in winning a prestigious award for her employer as a selling point at the beginning of her resumé.

[Words for your resumé

This section encourages you consider three different kinds of words that all have a place in your resumé:

1. action verbs
2. keywords
3. quantifiers and qualifiers.

Action verbs

Action verbs add punch to descriptions of your accomplishments, responsibilities and activities. Use them as the first words in bulleted lists of skills, accomplishments and responsibilities.

Check off the action verbs below that you can use in your resumé (see the resumé examples in Part Two for examples of action verbs at work):

- ❑ achieved
- ❑ adapted
- ❑ addressed
- ❑ administered
- ❑ advised
- ❑ analyzed
- ❑ anticipated
- ❑ appraised
- ❑ arbitrated
- ❑ arranged
- ❑ assembled
- ❑ assessed
- ❑ attained
- ❑ audited
- ❑ budgeted
- ❑ built
- ❑ calculated
- ❑ charted
- ❑ checked
- ❑ clarified
- ❑ classified
- ❑ coached
- ❑ collected
- ❑ communicated
- ❑ compiled
- ❑ completed
- ❑ composed
- ❑ computed
- ❑ conducted
- ❑ conserved
- ❑ consolidated
- ❑ constructed
- ❑ consulted
- ❑ contracted
- ❑ contributed
- ❑ controlled
- ❑ co-ordinated
- ❑ counselled
- ❑ created
- ❑ decided
- ❑ decreased
- ❑ defined
- ❑ delegated
- ❑ designed
- ❑ detected
- ❑ determined
- ❑ developed
- ❑ diagnosed
- ❑ directed
- ❑ discovered
- ❑ dispensed
- ❑ displayed
- ❑ disproved
- ❑ dissected
- ❑ distributed
- ❑ doubled
- ❑ drafted
- ❑ dramatized
- ❑ drew
- ❑ edited
- ❑ eliminated
- ❑ empathized
- ❑ energized
- ❑ enforced
- ❑ established
- ❑ estimated
- ❑ evaluated
- ❑ examined
- ❑ expanded
- ❑ experimented
- ❑ explained
- ❑ extracted
- ❑ filed
- ❑ financed
- ❑ fixed
- ❑ formulated
- ❑ founded
- ❑ gathered
- ❑ generated
- ❑ guided
- ❑ handled
- ❑ hauled
- ❑ headed
- ❑ helped
- ❑ hypothesized
- ❑ identified
- ❑ illustrated
- ❑ implemented
- ❑ improved
- ❑ improvised
- ❑ increased
- ❑ influenced
- ❑ informed
- ❑ initiated
- ❑ inspired
- ❑ instituted
- ❑ instructed
- ❑ integrated
- ❑ interpreted
- ❑ interviewed
- ❑ introduced
- ❑ invented
- ❑ inventoried
- ❑ investigated
- ❑ involved
- ❑ judged
- ❑ learned
- ❑ lectured
- ❑ led
- ❑ listened
- ❑ made
- ❑ maintained
- ❑ managed
- ❑ manipulated
- ❑ mediated
- ❑ mentored
- ❑ modelled
- ❑ monitored
- ❑ motivated
- ❑ multiplied
- ❑ navigated
- ❑ negotiated
- ❑ observed
- ❑ obtained
- ❑ offered
- ❑ opened
- ❑ operated

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- ❑ ordered
- ❑ organized
- ❑ oversaw
- ❑ painted
- ❑ perceived
- ❑ performed
- ❑ persuaded
- ❑ piloted
- ❑ planned
- ❑ played
- ❑ predicted
- ❑ prepared
- ❑ prescribed
- ❑ presented
- ❑ processed
- ❑ produced
- ❑ programmed
- ❑ projected
- ❑ promoted
- ❑ proposed
- ❑ protected
- ❑ provided
- ❑ publicized
- ❑ purchased
- ❑ questioned
- ❑ raised
- ❑ realized
- ❑ reasoned
- ❑ received
- ❑ recommended
- ❑ reconciled
- ❑ recruited
- ❑ reduced
- ❑ referred
- ❑ rehabilitated
- ❑ related
- ❑ remembered
- ❑ repaired
- ❑ reported
- ❑ represented
- ❑ researched
- ❑ resolved
- ❑ responded
- ❑ restored
- ❑ retrieved
- ❑ reviewed
- ❑ revised
- ❑ revitalized
- ❑ risked
- ❑ saved
- ❑ scheduled
- ❑ screened
- ❑ selected
- ❑ sensed
- ❑ separated
- ❑ served
- ❑ set up
- ❑ shaped
- ❑ shared
- ❑ showed
- ❑ simplified
- ❑ sketched
- ❑ sold
- ❑ solved
- ❑ spoke
- ❑ stimulated
- ❑ streamlined
- ❑ strengthened
- ❑ structured
- ❑ studied
- ❑ succeeded
- ❑ summarized
- ❑ supervised
- ❑ supplied
- ❑ supported
- ❑ surveyed
- ❑ symbolized
- ❑ systematized
- ❑ talked
- ❑ taught
- ❑ team-built
- ❑ tended
- ❑ tested
- ❑ trained
- ❑ transcribed
- ❑ transferred
- ❑ translated
- ❑ travelled
- ❑ tripled
- ❑ uncovered
- ❑ unified
- ❑ upgraded
- ❑ used
- ❑ widened
- ❑ won
- ❑ wrote

Keywords

Keywords are descriptive words and phrases, usually nouns, that may be associated with certain industries or disciplines. By using keywords, you're telling employers that you:

- have studied certain subjects
- have earned a particular credential
- know how to use specific tools (e.g. a computer program or power tools)
- have certain types of skills (e.g. public speaking skills or sales ability).

It's important to include keywords in your resumé for two reasons:

- Keywords are considered standard in certain industries and are used by employers to assess skill and experience. For example, an accountant's resumé would include keywords such as budget analysis, spreadsheets, auditing and tax analysis.
- Your resumé may be searched, either by a person or a software program, for keywords that match specific criteria and screened out if the keywords or their synonyms aren't included.

What keywords should you use?

Follow these suggestions to ensure you include the appropriate keywords to describe your qualifications in your resumé and cover letter:

- Use the keywords and phrases that appear in the job ad or posting.
- Visit the employer's website and study the detailed description of the job you're applying for. Browse the rest of the website for additional keywords.
- Visit other related websites, including those of competitors, industry associations, trade publications and sites with occupational profiles to gather current industry keywords.
- Enter keywords into a search engine or into the search function of a job postings website. Reviewing several ads for similar positions will give you a better idea of the keywords to use.
- File (on computer or on paper) every ad you respond to for future reference.
- Talk to people in the industry or company and ask them about the qualifications for the position.

In the following example from Amy Harden's resumé, the keywords have been bolded:

Technical Qualifications:

- **Standard ecological field methods**, including **operation and maintenance of field equipment, collection and analysis techniques, natural resource assessments and monitoring**.
- Experienced in **wetland delineation, classification** and **restoration**.
- Detailed knowledge of **current environmental** regulations.
- **GPS/air photo interpretation**.
- Extensive **laboratory experience**.
- **CPR** and **H_2S certification**.

Qualifiers and quantifiers

Qualifiers are adjectives and adverbs that will add depth and focus to descriptions of your accomplishments, skills and knowledge. Try not to overuse them. As you read the following list of qualifiers, think of others you could use:

completely	significant	substantial
effectively	safely	well-rounded
proficient	successful	well-educated
profitable	specialized	

Quantifiers describe size, quantity, length and cost. For example, "Trained staff on the inventory system over a period of months with a resulting decline in errors" is a description without a quantifier. Add three quantifiers and the description takes on new meaning and impact: "Trained **150** staff on the inventory system over a period of **three** months with a resulting **75 per cent** decline in errors."

For more information about using quantifiers, see **Example: Accomplishment statements** in Part One or check the use of qualifiers and quantifiers in the example resumés in Part Two.

Special circumstances and potential resumé problems

This section describes special circumstances that may present obstacles to employment and suggests ways to address these situations when writing your resumé.

You're qualified but don't have the specific degree, diploma or experience requested

Explain how your education and experience relate to the job requirements. You may need to mention relevant courses from your education that would interest the employer. There are many certificate, diploma and degree programs available. Employers may be familiar with only some of them.

Emphasizing your experience as well as your education helps in this situation, even if it's volunteer experience.

Your credentials are from another province or country

Ask an appropriate authority, such as a university, professional regulatory organization or an assessment agency such as the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) to evaluate your credentials. Employers will want to know what the Canadian or provincial equivalents are. Include an official assessment with your resumé or tell employers you'll bring it to an interview.

IQAS is a mail-in service only and charges a fee for reports. For more information, call 780-427-2655 in Edmonton or dial 310-0000 toll-free outside Edmonton and enter the 10-digit number. You can visit the IQAS website at **immigration.alberta.ca/iqas**

Each province and territory in Canada has different legislation and regulations governing employment in the professions and trades. For more information, visit the Certification and Registration Requirements for Employment in Alberta (CERTinfo) website at **alis.alberta.ca/certinfo**

You don't have a high school diploma

If you have an extensive employment background or a demonstrated range of skills, list this in your resumé before your education. Use a heading such as Education and Development and list workshops and seminars you've taken, followed simply by "high school."

If you didn't finish high school and have no post-secondary education, you can omit any reference to formal education in your resumé. In some cases, education may not be an issue. However, since it may come up in the interview, be prepared to talk about your experience in a positive way.

If you have a post-secondary credential of any kind, it's not necessary to reveal that you didn't complete high school.

Your post-secondary education is incomplete

Without explaining your situation, you may risk losing an opportunity. Rather than describing your post-secondary education incompletely (for example, Marketing Research – NAIT – 2001), let the employer know that Marketing Research is a credit course in the NAIT Business Administration diploma program by describing it that way: for example, Marketing Research, NAIT – Business Administration Diploma Program – 2005 to present, in progress or to be completed by July 2007. This tells the employer that you're in the process of earning a post-secondary credential.

You've been out of the workforce for a long time

Even though you've been out of the workforce, you may have other relevant volunteer or life experiences. Use the heading Relevant Experience and describe your volunteer responsibilities. Include organization names and dates, just as you would for paid employment.

A combination or functional resumé works best in these circumstances, allowing you to highlight skills areas such as communication skills, teamwork, problem solving, computer skills and so on.

If you are a job seeker with a disability, visit the ALIS Tip Sheet called Finding Work Opportunities as a Person With a Disability at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**

Your most relevant experience isn't your most recent experience

You can highlight your past work experience by including a one- or two-line statement near the top of your resumé under a heading such as Profile or Highlights that says something positive and relevant to the job such as "extensive customer service experience" or "strong computer systems design and consulting skills."

Another approach is to list Most Relevant Professional Background first, followed by Other Professional Background. Using a combination or functional resumé will allow you to highlight your skills rather than the dates of your employment.

You were terminated from your last job

Ironic but true: employers are more likely to regard you as a desirable applicant if you're currently employed. If employers can tell from your resumé that you're not employed, they'll wonder why. Of course, there are many reasons why you may not be working that have nothing to do with your capabilities: company merger, temporary position, project employment, downsizing, business failure and so on.

If you provide employment dates, think carefully about how to let the employer know about your circumstances:

- If you were working in a contract or temporary position, add an explanation such as "temporary project position—completed."
- For other situations, you may want to add a short explanation in your cover letter—"company went out of business" or "downsizing resulted in 33 layoffs"—or leave your explanation for the interview.

- If you were fired as a result of your performance or a conflict, don't include this information in your resumé. Prepare an explanation for the interview. Talk to a career and employment counsellor or read books and Internet articles about preparing for job interviews to find a positive way to speak about your experience. (See Part Three for interview tips.)

You may face discrimination on the basis of your gender, age, race, religion or other characteristics

As previously discussed, human rights legislation protects you from having to reveal your age, gender, marital status, number of dependants, religion, nationality or ethnic background. You don't have to supply this information unless you feel it will enhance your competitiveness.

If you're applying for positions typically performed by members of the opposite gender, providing your full name may work for or against you. If your gender might work against you and you have a gender-specific first name, use only your first initials and surname. On the other hand, if you know an organization is trying to diversify its workforce, use your full name and let the employer know if you're an Aboriginal person, member of a cultural minority or person with a disability. Reveal this information subtly in your cover letter. For example, "In addition to meeting your requirements of having considerable customer service experience, I have an undergraduate degree in economics earned in my native country, Nigeria."

Likewise, you don't have to reveal your age if you feel it is a potential barrier. If your high school or university graduation year reveals your age, don't supply the date. You also don't have to include your early years of employment.

If you're looking for work in Canada for the first time, discuss your situation with someone you respect who understands Canadian employers' expectations. For example, a newer Canadian might, because of language differences, reveal spelling or grammar deficiencies in a resumé or cover letter. Guard against this possibility by asking for feedback.

If you're a recent immigrant...

The publication *Working in Alberta* is loaded with useful information on all aspects of the Alberta workplace, from writing resumés to rights and responsibilities. It's available online at **alis.alberta.ca/publications** or in print at Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres.

For each of the circumstances described above, you'll find help and information by phone at the Career Information Hotline, online at **alis.alberta.ca** and in person at Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres. See the **Helpful Resources** section for contact information.

For additional strategies for overcoming obstacles to employment, visit **alis.alberta.ca/tips** and go to Tips by Topic. Under Employment choose About Resumés and Cover Letters. Here you'll find a series of tips on what to do if you are overqualified, have an invisible disability, have unavailable or problematic references or have a criminal record.

In this section you've studied different types of resumés, thought about what kind of information to include in your resumé and how to organize it and considered what words to use to effectively describe your skills and accomplishments. In the following exercise you'll put all this together with what you've discovered about your skills and accomplishments in the exercises in Part One and start working on your resumé.

[Exercise: Resumé master

Not everything you list on the worksheet below will go on every resumé that you send out. Think of this as a master document from which you pick and choose relevant skills and accomplishments as you tailor your resumé to reflect the needs of different employers.

If you've never written a resumé, the following exercise will help you get started. If you have, this exercise will give you the opportunity to try out the approaches and suggestions you've been reading about in this publication.

Step 1

Make copies of the following worksheet if you need more space for writing or if you think you may write more than one draft of the document.

Step 2

List your employment history in reverse chronological order (most recent experience first), including the month and year you started and left each position. If you've developed or demonstrated work-related skills through volunteer work, list those experiences as well as paid employment. Describe your responsibilities in point form.

Step 3

Use the skills inventory and skill description exercises in **Identifying your skills** (Part One) to help you list your skills.

Step 4

If you're using a combination or functional resumé format, group your skills in skill sets—for example, technical skills, management skills or communication skills—depending on the requirements of your job target. (Your skill sets may be different each time you write your resumé.)

Step 5

Review the accomplishment exercises you completed in Part One. Describe your accomplishments in the space provided, using qualifiers and quantifiers.

Step 6

Describe your education and training. Include professional development and work-related courses as well as adult or community education courses.

Step 7

List the organizations (community, cultural, professional, social) that you belong to or volunteer for. If you haven't already done so, add any work-related skills you've gained through these experiences to your skills list.

Step 8

List all the activities you are or have been involved in, even those that may seem unrelated to your career. Add any work-related skills you've gained through these experiences to your skills list.

[Resumé master worksheet

Employment history

Work Title

Organization

Dates

Supervisor/Manager

Key Responsibilities

Work Title

Organization

Dates

Supervisor/Manager

Key Responsibilities

Work Title

Organization

Dates

Supervisor/Manager

Key Responsibilities

Work Title

Organization

Dates

Supervisor/Manager

Key Responsibilities

Skills

Skill sets (if using a combination/functional resumé)

Accomplishments

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Education and training

School (College/Technical/University):

Program/Credential (Certificate, Diploma, Degree):

Year Graduated or Credits:

School (College/Technical/University):

Program/Credential (Certificate, Diploma, Degree):

Year Graduated or Credits:

School (College/Technical/University):

Program/Credential (Certificate, Diploma, Degree):

Year Graduated or Credits:

High School: Year Graduated:

Diploma/Grade Completed:

Professional development workshops and seminars
Adult education and other courses

Work-related and community memberships and volunteer work

Organization How you are/were involved

Activities/interests/hobbies

[Tailoring your resumé

Tailoring your resumé means highlighting relevant qualifications to show a specific employer that you have the skills, experience and training to succeed in a particular job. This demonstrates that you place a high priority on the employer's needs. To tailor your resumé, you need to:

- understand the job requirements from the employer's point of view
- learn about the employer
- describe your qualifications in keywords and phrases that are the same or similar to those that appear in the job ad or posting.

Use the following suggestions to help you get started:

- Review what you've learned about the prospective employer.
- Choose the resumé type best suited for the position.
- Refer to the **Resumé master worksheet** for descriptions of your employment history, skills, accomplishments, education and training, community involvement and interests.
- Choose resumé headings and arrange them in a way that highlights your most relevant qualifications at the beginning of your resumé. Review the resumé examples for ideas.
- Study the job posting and other information about the employer and the industry for keywords. Make sure to include relevant keywords, or similar words, in your resumé.

Your approach will vary depending on the occupation or industry you want to work in and the qualifications you want to emphasize. For example, if you're a pilot, your resumé will probably be most effective if you follow the industry standard and list the details of the aircraft you're licensed to fly near the top of the first page. On the other hand, if you're a pilot seeking a career change, it's probably a good idea to highlight your strongest employability skills—the skills that are essential regardless of occupation, such as personal and teamwork skills.

If you're applying for more than one type of work, you'll need more than one resumé. For example, Janice Jobin is interested in three types of work:

- firefighter
- telecommunications technologist
- supervisor of telephone installers.

Since each type of position requires different skills and knowledge, Janice will need at least three different resumés. Her basic resumé for firefighting positions should emphasize her:

- physical strength and agility
- knowledge and understanding of firefighting
- safety training and technical firefighting courses
- teamwork skills and adaptability
- attraction to adventure
- sports and athletic involvement
- commitment to helping others
- volunteer firefighting experience
- background in naval cadets.

Her resumé for telecommunications technologist positions should emphasize her:

- technical telecommunications skills and journeyman certification
- Telecommunications Technologist Diploma
- special employment-related project assignments
- interpersonal skills
- problem-solving skills.

Her resumé for supervisory positions should emphasize her:

- ability to motivate
- ability to delegate
- ability to hire, train and coach
- ability to provide feedback
- ability to listen, organize, plan and make decisions
- telecommunications technical expertise
- supervisory or management training
- leadership roles in volunteer, sports and community activities.

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Unlike Janice, you may not be interested in pursuing work in three different fields. However, the principle that her example illustrates still applies: you'll continue to write and rewrite your resumé and your other marketing tools throughout your work search. You'll tailor them to each specific job you apply for and change information as your skills, achievements and experiences evolve.

Example: Tailoring your resumé

The following example shows how one job seeker, Steven Cordeiro, tailors his resumé for a position he's interested in. Steven, a recent university graduate, is currently employed at a financial institution. He'd like to find a customer service position that will allow him to develop his interpersonal skills and advance to a management level.

Steven found the following position posted on the website of a specialty sports clothing company. Specific job requirements are in bold print.

Steven explores Great Gear's website and learns that the company takes pride in the quick problem-solving abilities of its sales staff and supports and values volunteer activities. He tailors his resumé to reflect the requirements outlined in the job posting and what he learned about the company's values from his additional research on the website.

Read carefully through Steven's resumé. How does he demonstrate that he meets the requirements for this position and that he shares the company's values?

Great Gear

We are a specialty sports clothing supplier seeking a qualified individual to enhance our sales team. The ideal candidate is **customer service oriented, comfortable dealing with and resolving customer needs in a timely and professional manner**. Working closely with other members of the sales team, the successful candidate will **build customer relationships, execute program sales, use Electronic Data Interchange order entry, process special orders, and generate reports and sales data**.

The successful candidate will be at home in the **Microsoft Office environment (particularly Excel)**. Preference will be given to those with a **degree specializing in Marketing**, or a related field, and **prior sales experience**. Equivalencies will be considered.

We are seeking a **team player** with **excellent communication and time management skills** who thrives in a **fast-paced environment**.

Tailored resumé

STEVEN CORDEIRO
9999 Unknown Drive
Big City, Alberta
T1E 5I5

Email: scordeiro@email.ca
Phone: 780-555-2222

Profile

- Energetic, customer service oriented professional.
- Team player with extensive sales experience and demonstrated ability to respond to customer needs.
- Strong communication and time management skills.
- Proven computer skills including Excel, Word and Electronic Data Interchange order entry.

Education

Bachelor of Arts, Economics, ABC University 2005
- Significant electives in Marketing.

Training and Development

- Proprietary account management software training, ABC Bank.
- Electronic Data Interchange Inventory Management (EDI) in-service, Independent Clothing Stores.

Employment Experience

Customer Service Representative July 2005–present
ABC Bank
- Provided friendly and responsive service to a high volume of corporate and private clients.
- Offered strategic solutions to account management challenges using company's proprietary software, reducing standard account service time by 20 per cent and increasing customer satisfaction by 15 per cent.
- Processed large commercial accounts, balanced daily transactions, updated computer files.

Customer Service May 2004–June 2005
Part-time position
Independent Clothing Stores
- Developed strong customer relationships and built a solid customer base.
- Received part-time employee of the month award twice for excellence in customer service.
- Trained five new staff on Electronic Data Interchange order entry and other policies and procedures.
- Maintained inventory (EDI) and organized stock.
- Created window and floor displays and performed sales transactions.

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Customer Service — September 2003–April 2004
Part-time position — September 2002–April 2003
Cycle and Sports
- Sold sport clothing, bicycles and other sporting goods as part of sales team.
- Responded to customer service needs, operated cash system, balanced cash.
- Serviced products, opened and closed shop.

Operator 1 — Summer 2002, 2003, 2004
Summer position
Big City Parks and Recreation department
- Operated and maintained heavy-duty equipment, repaired and maintained turf.
- Co-operated and worked effectively with other operators.

Server — December 2001–May 2002
Trendy Restaurant
- Provided excellent service to more than 30 customers per hour.
- Promoted products and increased revenue by successful up-selling.
- Performed efficiently as part of dynamic team in a fast-paced environment.

Labourer — Summer of 2000, 2001
Oakview Golf Course
- Maintained golf course, including turf repair, irrigation repair and grass cutting, covering course at least twice a day to spot any maintenance issues.
- Worked independently, scheduled priorities and managed time effectively.
- Responded quickly to problems reported by customers and staff.

Community Involvement and Interests

- Volunteer as minor lacrosse coach and vice-president of cycling club.
- Play team sports such as squash, hockey and lacrosse.

Resumé dos and don'ts

Your resumé represents you. It showcases not only your qualifications but your ability to communicate clearly, concisely and accurately on paper. Here are some tips to help you make sure your resumé is clear, concise, easy to read and error-free:

Do:

- use a standard word-processing font such as Arial, Times or Courier in a size between 10 and 14 points when typing your resumé.
- keep your resumé to three pages or less. The ideal length is two pages. Although some resumé-writing publications may recommend one page, most Canadian employers want more detail than that. If you're applying for a managerial or professional position or preparing a curriculum vitae, three or more pages may be appropriate.
- leave as much white (blank) space as you can while keeping the length to about two pages. Balance margin width on the top, bottom and sides.
- use bulleted lists that allow employers to read your resumé quickly.
- use good quality 8.5-inch x 11-inch white or slightly off-white paper. Elements like paper texture or colours and graphics will make your resumé difficult to scan or reproduce accurately.
- try to avoid underlining (except for web links) and italics if you think your resumé will be scanned. (You'll find more information about scanning resumés later in Part Two.)
- align headings (for example skill titles, work titles) along the left side of the page
- be sure your name and phone number are on each page of the resumé and the pages are numbered.
- be sure copies of your resumé are clean, bright, straight and stain-free
- proofread your resumé (or have someone else proofread it) to be sure it's free of spelling and grammatical errors. Don't rely on the spellcheck tool in a word processing program, which won't catch omitted words or errors in usage.
- use a paper clip rather than a staple to hold the pages together
- always mail or deliver your resumé in a 9-inch x 12-inch envelope.

Don't:

- sign your resumé
- handwrite your resumé
- title your resumé with the word *Resumé*
- include personal information such as height, weight, marital status, age, gender, race, religious or ethnic background
- include your references unless the employer asks that they be included
- bind your resumé in cerlox, Duo-Tang or other special folders
- fold your resumé.

[Exercise: Resumé checklist

This exercise summarizes many of the resumé dos and don'ts discussed throughout this section. Use the checklist to critique you own resumé or provide it as a guide for anyone who may be reviewing your resumé. Make any necessary changes and corrections.

Overall appearance

- ❑ Does the resumé look professional?
- ❑ Was the resumé created using a standard word-processing font such as Courier, Arial or Times? Is the font size appropriate (e.g. 10 to 14 points)?
- ❑ Is contact information written clearly at the top of the first page?
- ❑ Does contact name, phone number and the page number appear on subsequent pages?
- ❑ Does the resumé have a good balance of print and white space? Does it have even margins?
- ❑ Is the layout appealing, uncluttered and easy to read?
- ❑ Is the resumé free of errors in grammar or spelling?

Length/conciseness

- ❑ Is the length appropriate (no more than three pages, ideally two pages)?
- ❑ Can any words be cut?

Relevance

- ❑ Are the qualifications most relevant to the job objective highlighted?
- ❑ If personal information is included, is it relevant to the position?

Qualifications and accomplishments

- ❑ Does the resumé emphasize the qualifications the employer is looking for?
- ❑ Are achievements, awards, recognitions and scope of responsibilities included and described clearly?
- ❑ Are specific examples provided to demonstrate qualifications and accomplishments?
- ❑ Do accomplishment statements include quantifiers and qualifiers?
- ❑ Do descriptions of skills, accomplishments and responsibilities begin with action verbs?
- ❑ Are appropriate keywords used?

Clarity

- ❑ Are the appropriate headings used?
- ❑ Do headings organize and highlight information clearly and consistently?
- ❑ Are abbreviations that aren't keywords or terms commonly used in the industry spelled out?

Completeness

- ❑ Does the resumé include all important information and details?

Formatting your resumé

Formatting is a fairly new development in resumé preparation. Previously, all you needed was a well-written resumé printed clearly. Not any more!

There are now a variety of ways in which employers want and expect resumés to be submitted, including:

- as an email attachment
- in an online application or resumé builder tool
- by fax
- posted on a job search website
- in hard copy, sent by mail or hand delivered.

Although you'll still need a paper resumé to hand to people you meet and to present at an interview, you're far more likely to submit your resumé by email than by mail.

Many employers prefer to receive an electronic version of your resumé so it can be:

- circulated and stored electronically
- uploaded or scanned into recruiting or applicant tracking software from an email attachment, fax or print copy
- reformatted from an online application or resumé builder software.

To determine what resumé format to submit, read the job ad or posting carefully. If the format isn't specified there, visit the employer's or recruiter's website. If you can't find the specified format after taking these steps, call or email the employer or recruiter and ask.

It's very important to follow the formatting requirements provided as closely as possible. If you send an email attachment using incompatible word processing software, for example, your resumé will likely be screened out. At the very least, the employer will question your attention to detail.

Arranging your resumé in each of the following formats will give you the flexibility you need to market yourself effectively online and on paper.

Paper resumés and email attachments

Today's standard business word processing program is Microsoft Word. Most employers who specifically request, or will accept, your resumé as an email attachment are capable of receiving it as a Microsoft Word document. A growing number of job search websites will let you upload your resumé as a Microsoft Word document. Human resources professionals and up-to-date sources are clear: **the resumé as an attached document, usually a Microsoft Word document, is the current standard**. This should translate well onto an employer's computer screen and will also make a favourable impression as printed and faxed documents. The resumés that appeared earlier in Part Two are all examples of well-designed Microsoft Word documents.

When you're ready to save and send your resumé as an email attachment, you have three choices. You can save your resumé as a:

1. **.doc** file, the most common file format (this is the typical file format for Word documents). The employer may specifically request this format, especially if your resumé will be reformatted by the employer.
2. **.rtf** file, or Rich Text Format. This file format maintains formatting such as tabs, fonts and margins in documents created on and transferred between different operating systems and software programs.
3. **.pdf** file, or Portable Document Format, which is as close to paper as online formats can get. It appears on screen exactly as you created it and the format can't be altered. To read or print your resumé, the employer will have to use Adobe Reader software, which can be downloaded free from the Internet.

Once you've created your resumé in Microsoft Word, email it as an attachment to a few friends to be sure it can be opened and read on a variety of computers.

Some employers ask that you send both your resumé and your cover letter in a single document as a single email attachment. In this case, your cover letter will be the first page.

[Scannable resumés

Some employers, especially larger organizations and those using third party recruiters or resumé handlers, will scan your resumé into recruiting software. Like many aspects of technology, scanning software is continually becoming more sophisticated. As a result, it's likely that your Microsoft Word resumé can be scanned by up-to-date scanning software without any problems. If you think your resumé will be scanned and the employer does not request a specific format, ask the employer which format would be best. If you want to be certain that your resumé will scan well, format your resumé as discussed in previous sections and follow these suggestions:

- Use boldface or all caps, which are readable in most systems, for headings. Avoid italics and underlines.
- Avoid using graphics, shading or two-column formats.
- Avoid horizontal and vertical lines or use them sparingly. If you use lines, leave at least a quarter inch of space around them.
- Don't condense the spacing between letters.
- Use white or light-coloured untextured paper to print your resumé. Do not staple or fold your resumé.
- Always fax using an original (not photocopy) of your resumé. Fax in fine mode rather than standard mode if you have the option.

Robert Brown's resumé in the **Plain text or ASCII resumé** section was created using these specifications.

Outdated print and online resources may tell you to include a keyword list or summary at the beginning of your resumé. This advice is based on the limited scanning capability of older resumé scanning software. Human resource professionals advise against using this approach. They recommend that you use keywords and their synonyms when describing your qualifications. Whether your resumé is screened by people or software, keywords will be seen and noted in the body of your resumé.

[Application forms

When you're required to complete an application form, ask if it would be acceptable to attach your resumé and only fill in your name, contact information, the position applied for and competition number on the form itself.

Some employers may want you to complete the entire application form and will reject your application if you don't. In this case, complete each section of the form in full. If you feel certain questions violate human rights, you may decide to:

- leave the question blank
- put a question mark after an offending question
- write something like "will provide at time of hiring."

For example, an employer requires information relating to marital status, number of dependants and age (in order to administer income tax deductions and benefits) **only if you're hired**. It's inappropriate for an employer to ask for this information on application forms.

If you're applying for entry-level positions that require some post-secondary education, employers may ask for a completed CACEE Application for Employment Form, a generic application form developed by the Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers. You can find this form at most campus career centres and on the CACEE website at **www.cacee.com**.

Online application forms/resumé builders

Online application forms, sometimes referred to as resumé builders or e-forms, often resemble paper application forms. Many job search websites provide these forms for you to use as a way of posting your resumé. At some employer websites, you're required to fill out this kind of form to apply for a position. Other employers (and increasingly, job search websites) offer you the option of uploading or emailing your resumé.

Given the choice, it's usually best to email or upload your resumé rather than use an online application form for several reasons:

- The forms ask you to present your qualifications in a way that the employer or job search website dictates, not necessarily in the way that markets you most effectively.
- Forms typically do not allow for formatting such as horizontal lines, white space in margins, etc.
- The amount of text you can insert may be limited—for example, a form may allow 600 characters (not words, but letters and spaces) for you to describe your technical skills.
- Forms do not provide editing tools like spellcheck. Also, it's less convenient for someone to proof your information in an online form than to proof your resumé.

If you must use an online form, an effective way to do this is to copy and paste the information to the form from a plain text version of your resumé (see the **Plain text or ASCII resumé** section that follows). When you copy and paste from your own plain text resumé, you can maintain some control over how your information is presented in the online form. Look at the pasted text carefully—you may have to make some adjustments, especially if the space available in the field is limited.

Some online application forms won't allow you to copy and paste from your resumé. In this case, you must type your qualifications directly into the form. Approach this task carefully and take your time. Have your resumé to refer to. If possible, have someone else proof the form before you send it.

Plain text or ASCII resumés

Plain text is sometimes referred to as ASCII (American Standard Code of Information Interchange), which is the code used in standard email. ASCII is so basic it can be read by virtually every operating system.

Use these suggestions to create a plain text or ASCII version of your resumé from a Word (.doc) file:

- Use standard fonts, such as Courier, Times, Helvetica or Arial.
- Don't use graphics, shading, tabs or columns.
- Use all caps for major headings. Avoid bold, italic or underlining.
- Change bullets to asterisks.
- Align text left.
- If you're including your plain text resumé in the body of an email, remember to remove your name, telephone number and page number at the top of the second page and adjust the space accordingly.

The resumé in this example is identical to the one in the **Example: Chronological resumé**, but it has been re-formatted as a plain text or ASCII resumé. Robert can include this version of his resumé in the body of an email as well as cut and paste directly from it into most online application forms.

Plain text or ASCII resumé

ROBERT BROWN
Box 1700
Urban City, Alberta
T2Z 2Z2

Email: rcbrown@email.ca
Phone: 403-555-7777

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

* More than four years of professional experience in teaching, coaching and leading youth in both rural and urban settings.

* Bachelor of Education with continued training in youth counselling.

* Work successfully with teens, including young offenders, in one-on-one and group settings.

* Strong communication skills, effective listener.

* Well-developed observational and assessment abilities, with demonstrated supportive counselling techniques.

* Effective leader and organizer of a broad range of sports activities.

* Able to relocate and live in a rural setting.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Education Degree

ABC University, 2001

Counselling Youth, certificate course

XYZ Community College, 2003

EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND

Parks and Recreation Co-ordinator, since August 2001

Urban City Recreation Board

* Organized, instructed and supervised youth recreation programs for groups of five to 100 participants.

* Developed and led successful youth outreach programs, currently used by 20 per cent of district teens.

* Initiated and guided teen talk-back group, chosen as alternative sentencing program for young offenders.

* Counselled and provided resources to youth and referred clients to other professionals as required.

* Worked as part of team of teachers, counsellors, corrections officers, social workers and other professionals to plan and evalulate programs.

Teacher Practicum, January 2001 to June 2001

Small City Junior/Senior High School

Small City, Alberta

* Taught Physical Education Grades 7 through 12 and Biology 30, including laboratory work, lectures, group work and field trips. Class sizes of 25 to 34 students.

* Coached soccer, supervised and monitored student behavior on school property.

Range Supervisor, June to August 2000

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

* Supervised data collection for lab- and field-based project.

* Worked independently and used computer software to input data for compilation and analysis.

CERTIFICATION

* CPR – St. John's Ambulance.

* Canadian Amateur Sport Certification Program: Canadian Soccer Association, Level 3, Canadian Football, Basketball, Gymnastic and Volleyball Associations, Level 1.

* Brown Belt – World Martial Art Council (WMAC).

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

* Vice-President, Rural District Minor Soccer Association, since 2001.

* Coach, Alberta Minor Soccer Association, since 1996.

Athletic Awards

* WMAC International Brown Belt Champion,

World Martial Art Council division one Conference champion, 2000 to 2002.

* WMAC Brown Belt World Contender – ranking issued as of August 1999 until title championship 2000.

* Award of Excellence, Canadian Soccer Association.

REFERENCES

* Available upon request.

[Alternative resumé formats

Advances in digital technology have opened up several possibilities for creating resumés in alternative formats, including:

- CDs and mini-CDs (the size of a business card) containing a variety of information, from resumé text complete with graphics or animation to portfolio pieces and links to websites
- resumés included as pages on a personal website
- video resumés, in which job seekers introduce themselves on camera.

Many Alberta employers and human resources professionals tend to regard these formats as cutting edge, particularly outside of creative occupations like web design, graphic design, communications and marketing, broadcasting and so on. Presenting your resumé in an alternative format in other occupational areas means taking the risk of being labelled too innovative or not a good fit for the organization.

Generally speaking, alternative formats are most effective when you use them as part of your portfolio (discussed later in Part Two) rather than your initial resumé submission. After your standard resumé has generated interest and an interview, an employer is much more likely to take the trouble to view your work on CD or visit your website.

If you feel that an alternative format resumé would be the best choice for a job you're interested in, discuss this possibility first with someone who knows the industry well. A word of caution: think carefully before you include photographs or footage of yourself in an alternative format resumé unless your image is an important consideration (for example, in television broadcasting). Because of human rights concerns, employers prefer to assess your qualifications without reference to gender, age, race and so on. However, including images of yourself in your portfolio is acceptable because you typically present your portfolio at the time of an interview.

With your resumé written and formatted, your next step is to prepare some other essential marketing tools: references and cover letters or emails.

✆ Choosing effective references

Your references—people who know you and can tell an employer about your character, skills and work experience—are a crucial part of your marketing strategy. Your references should be people who:

- know you well enough to be able to answer specific questions about your character, skills and work ethic
- can recommend you to employers without reservation
- have good communication skills, especially on the phone, as most employers prefer to check references this way.

You should have at least three references who have either supervised you or worked closely with you (on the job, at school or in volunteer situations). If you have limited experience, some may be personal references (people who can vouch for your character but haven't directly supervised or observed your work).

Take the following steps before including people on your list of references:

- Ask permission to give their name and contact information to employers.
- Ask whether they prefer to be contacted by phone, by email or in writing.
- Ask your references if they feel comfortable providing a positive recommendation. Don't assume they do. To succeed in finding work, you need references who sincerely believe you're a valuable worker. If a potential reference gives you any indication that he or she wouldn't be completely comfortable recommending your work, ask someone else. If a reference sounds hesitant about answering a question, for whatever reason, employers may become suspicious.
- To ensure your references are ready to answer questions promptly and positively, give them a copy of your resumé and let them know what position(s) you will be applying for and which skills you want to emphasize.
- Contact your references each time you provide their name to a potential employer.

- Discuss the details about how and why you left or are leaving your job. Your explanation must be the same as your reference's and as positive as possible.
- Give your references enough time to respond to requests from potential employers, preferably a few days to prepare for a phone call and two weeks to provide a reference letter.

Because of potential legal issues, many organizations have developed guidelines for providing references. Some will provide only employment dates, position and salary information. Others will include only information from a performance review that you've endorsed. If one of your references is restricted in this way, you may want to ask that person to let potential employers know this response is company policy and isn't a reflection of your performance.

Once you've identified your references, create a list including each reference's:

- name
- position they hold and organization they represent
- phone number they have provided
- email address they have provided
- relationship to you (for example, immediate supervisor or client)
- any contact preferences (time or method) they might have.

Don't include your references on your resumé. Most employers don't expect or want to contact your references until they've interviewed and even shortlisted you. And including your references in resumés you post online may compromise your references' privacy. Use a phrase such as "References available upon request" at the end of your resumé and bring your list of references to the interview.

Remember to thank your references each time you use their names, whether or not you land the job.

[Letters of reference

Letters of reference are typewritten or emailed business letters from your references addressing potential employers about you.

There are two kinds of letters of reference, also known as letters of recommendation: an *employment or performance reference letter* and a *personal or character reference letter*. People who will provide employment references have worked with you and will write about your knowledge, skills and experience. People who will provide personal references know you but haven't supervised your work on the job, at school or in volunteer situations. They can't tell employers about your performance but can provide important character references.

For a variety of reasons, many employers no longer give much weight to letters of reference. The majority of them will prefer to contact your references by phone. However, a letter may be the best way to get a recommendation if your reference is about to retire or if you or your reference are moving to a different location.

Be specific when you ask people to write letters of reference. Provide information about where to send letters or emails and whether you want them to send it directly to a potential employer or to you. Tell your references why you need the letter and give them a copy of your resumé.

If you want a general employment reference (a letter of reference for your portfolio, for example), let your references know what knowledge, skills and experience you want to emphasize. Their letters should confirm and support what you say in your cover letter and resumé. If possible, show them the job ad or posting.

A letter of reference that you can show to a number of employers—the kind of letter that you'd likely include in your portfolio—will be more general. However, it's still important to give your references as much information as possible about your work search targets. This will help them decide what information about your character, skills and performance to stress in their letters. Don't send letters of recommendation with your resumé unless you're asked to do so. Instead, bring them to the interview and ask the interviewers if they would like to see them.

Always send a card or email to thank the people who provide you with letters of reference.

Writing cover letters and emails

The cover letter or email, which you always send along with your resumé, is another important marketing tool. Think of your resumé as a movie and your cover letter as the trailer that makes people want to see it.

In your cover letter or email, you want to show the employer that you're:

- qualified for the position
- confident about your abilities
- excited about the prospect of working for the organization
- outstanding among the other candidates.

You want to give the employer one or two compelling reasons to read your resumé and then call you in for an interview. A cover letter or email offers you the opportunity to write persuasively about your qualifications and what you can offer.

In your cover letter or email:

- quote the competition number and title and tell how you learned about the position, if applicable
- use keywords and action verbs but, where possible, not the same ones that you use in your resumé
- highlight your relevant qualifications
- include information that lets the employer know you've researched the company and the position
- stress what you can contribute to the organization.

When sending your resumé by email, follow these additional suggestions:

- If the employer expects to receive your resumé and cover letter in a single attachment, format the document so that the cover letter is the first page. Send the attachment to a few friends to be sure the letter and the resumé remain on separate pages within the single document. If they end up on the same page, try saving your document as a Rich Text Format (.rtf) document to maintain the formatting.
- If the employer doesn't ask for a cover letter but requires your resumé as an attachment, consider the email to which the resumé is attached to be your cover letter.

Employers do not expect you to sign a cover letter sent as an attachment or as an email. Typing your name is sufficient. If you've digitized your signature, feel free to use it.

TIP

Writing cover letters

- Keep it short, simple and specific—no more than three paragraphs and no more than one page or one screen in length.
- It's always best to send your cover letter or email and resumé to a specific person—the hiring manager, a human resources employee or the business owner, for example. Phone or email the organization to find out who that person would be for the position you're interested in.
- Write the way you speak. Avoid stuffy, formal words and phrases such as "Enclosed please find." Instead, say something like "I'm keenly interested in _____ and believe I have the qualifications you are looking for."
- Limit the number of sentences beginning with "I."
- Be original and show enthusiasm.
- Make sure your letter contains no spelling mistakes or errors in grammar.
- Use a computer to produce a clean, typed copy.
- If providing a hard copy, use good quality paper.

The following template illustrates the elements of a cover letter.

[Example: Cover letter template

Your Address
City, Province
Postal Code

Date

Employer's name
Employer's position or title
Organization name
City, Province
Postal Code

Dear [Employer's name]:

Re: Competition number and title, if applicable

Opening Paragraph
State your purpose for writing. Tell how you learned about the job and/or why you're applying. What is it about the job or organization that interests you?

Middle Paragraph
Emphasize specific knowledge and skills that make you a strong candidate for the job. Don't repeat the information that's in your resumé word for word (for example, "I have a Communications diploma and three years of experience"). Summarize instead: "Throughout my seven years of related experience, I have strengthened my skills as a communications specialist." Then emphasize particular strengths you have to offer that are relevant to the job. For example, "Your description of the 'ideal' candidate highlighted enthusiasm and strong interpersonal communication skills. My strengths in these areas have been highly valued in my previous and current positions, where I have frequently been commended for how effectively I have handled difficult customer situations." Don't emphasize how the opportunity will benefit you, even if it will. Think like an employer—make it clear how you can benefit the organization.

Closing Paragraph
Describe in assertive, positive language what you expect will happen or what you plan to do next. If you're responding to an ad, include a statement such as "I look forward to meeting you to discuss what I can offer your organization." If you're sending an unsolicited resumé, write something like "I will contact you early in the week of June 12th to set up an appointment with you. I look forward to discussing possible employment with (name of organization)." If you feel it would be to your advantage, mention your immediate availability or your willingness to travel or relocate. Indicate that you've enclosed or attached your resumé.

Sincerely,
(printed or faxed copy signed)
Your name

Enclosure

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[Example: Email cover letter

A resumé would be attached to the following email.

From: Rita Low <skilledadmin@mail.ca>
Date: January 10, 2007
To: recruit@bissellbrownbest.ca
Subject: Comp. #222-222 Skilled Admin. Assistant

Dear Mr. Sharma:

I have long been impressed with your company, so when I recently visited your website, I was delighted to find an opening that might have been made for me.

As my attached resumé shows, I exceed your requirements for the position of administrative assistant. With more than five years of progressively responsible experience with a major law firm, I am able to handle a high volume of diversified office responsibilities with a minimum of supervision. I believe I can contribute significantly to your law practice through my efficient, cost-saving and service-oriented approach. I have always enjoyed excellent working relationships at work, as my in-house contributions and awards will attest.

I look forward to meeting you in an interview.

Sincerely,
Rita Low

Example: Print or attachment cover letter

The following example re-writes the previous email as a letter. Notice how the two-column format allows the applicant to directly show how her qualifications meet or exceed the requirements.

Although this cover letter can be sent in print (signed) or as an email attachment, it won't work in the body of an email, since most email programs won't be able to maintain the two-column format. If you plan to use this approach in an email attachment, send it to a few friends first to be sure that the two-column format appears on screen as you intend it to.

1234 Right Street
Big City, AB T3M 1L5

Mr. Rajiv Sharma
Office Manager
Bissell, Brown, Best
8724 South Street
Big City, AB T2M 2B2

Dear Mr. Sharma

Re: Competition #222-222 Skilled Administrative Assistant

I have long been impressed with your company, so when I recently visited your website, I was delighted to find an opening that might have been made for me.

As my attached resumé shows, I exceed your requirements for the position of administrative assistant.

Your position requires:	**I offer:**
• A minimum of two years related experience	• More than five years of progressively responsible experience with a major law firm
• Proficient use of Microsoft Word	• Proficiency in all aspects of Microsoft Office, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access. • Keyboarding speed 55 wpm
• Office administration diploma or certificate	• Graduated from Office Administration, certificate program, ABC Business School

I am able to handle a high volume of diversified office responsibilities with a minimum of supervision. I believe I can contribute significantly to your law practice through my efficient, cost-saving and service-oriented approach. I have always enjoyed excellent working relationships at work, as my in-house contributions and awards will attest.

I look forward to meeting you in an interview.

Sincerely,
(printed or faxed copy signed)
Rita Low

✉ Other correspondence

In addition to cover letters and emails, you'll probably use other kinds of correspondence in your work search, including broadcast letters and thank you notes.

Example: Broadcast letters/emails and letters/emails of inquiry

Writing a broadcast letter or a letter of inquiry is a great way to break into the hidden job market. If you'd like to work for a particular company, don't wait for them to advertise an opening and then have to compete with many other candidates for the position. Instead, create your own opportunity or job lead by contacting the company and letting them know of your interest and what you have to offer.

Address your letter or email to the person in charge of hiring. Introduce yourself and explain why it would be mutually beneficial for you to meet. If you send an email, create a subject line that's intriguing and will ensure that your message will not be mistaken for junk mail.

The more you know about the company, the better you'll be able to identify their real or potential need and match your specific skills and background to meet it.

This sample letter of inquiry was written to explore a possible opportunity after the job seeker read a news article.

346 First Avenue
Everytown, AB T5T 7X7

August 1, 2007

Ms. Jane Smith
Chairman of Board
Theatre YYY
Everytown, Alberta
T5T 5T5

Re: Artistic Director

Dear Ms. Smith:

I was surprised by your current director's decision to resign. His contribution to Theatre YYY's success has been significant.

I am interested in meeting with you to discuss how I might fill your immediate need for a replacement. An experienced director, I have succeeded in increasing ticket sales by as much as 78 per cent in one season as a result of my commitment to audience program interests and my strong casting, directing and creative marketing skills. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you to significantly improve the financial status of your organization and help you continue to produce the fine quality of theatre for which your company is recognized.

I will contact you on Monday to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,
(printed or faxed copy signed)
Liz Carr

[Example: Thank you notes

Handwritten thank you notes are a good way to let people know you appreciate their help or consideration. Thank people who:

- spend time providing information or suggestions related to your job search
- give you job leads
- invite you to come in for an interview
- agree to be a reference or provide a letter of reference
- turn you down for a job.

If your correspondence with someone who has helped you has been by email, then an email is also an appropriate way in which to thank them. Otherwise, send your note on personal stationery or a small card.

When you're advised that you aren't the successful candidate in a job competition, write a thank you note that politely and briefly expresses your disappointment, reinforces your continued interest in the company and thanks the interviewer(s) for the opportunity to discuss your background.

The following example is an appropriate thank you after an *information interview*.

Dear Mrs. Patel:

I really appreciate the time and interest you gave me on Tuesday, March 27. The discussion was both helpful and inspiring. Your feedback and leads have given me renewed optimism.

I have already contacted John Ormsby at National Energy, as you suggested. We have a meeting scheduled for Friday.

Thanks again!

Warmest regards,
Joseph Kozub

The following is an example of a letter to be sent after a *job interview*.

Dear Ms. Mah:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the position of [insert name of position] on Tuesday.

I am more convinced than ever that I would be able to contribute to your objectives. Please feel free to call if there is any additional information I can supply to help you in your decision-making.

Best regards,
Frank G. Svenson

Other marketing tools

This section looks at other marketing tools that you may use in your work search, including:

- business cards
- portfolios
- proposals.

[Example: Business cards

Giving people a business card is a professional way of ensuring that they can contact you if they hear about an opportunity you might be interested in.

Although you can create business cards on a computer, the perforated paper used for printing computer-generated business cards often looks and feels homemade. For a more professional appearance, get your business cards from an office supply store that will design and print a large number of cards for a reasonable price.

Keep your business card simple, tasteful and consistent with the tone and style of others in your employment field.

If you're self-employed or do contract work, a business card is a must. If you need more space to describe your products or services, develop a brochure as well.

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Include the following information on your business card:

- your name, followed by a professional designation, college diploma or university degree if you have one
- your field of work (for example, Mechanical Engineer, Health Care Professional, Adult Educator, Administrative Assistant, Musician, Sales Representative)
- your contact information (telephone number, fax number, cell phone number and email address)
- your company name, if you have your own company
- up to three points that describe your work, skills and characteristics.

You can also use the space on the back of your card to market yourself by briefly listing your skills and accomplishments.

The following is an example of an effective business card.

Doris Lutko

Administrative Assistant

- Contract, Temporary or Part-Time Work
- Microsoft Office Excel SAP
- Accurate and efficient

Tel 403-555-9999 Email dorisl@email.ca

Portfolios

An employment portfolio is a portable collection of items that provides concrete evidence of your skills and accomplishments. It can be:

- a collection of material assembled in a binder or an artist's portfolio
- a digital or online collection of documents and files
- a website.

Currently in Alberta, presenting a portfolio in an interview is still relatively uncommon outside of creative fields such as communications or graphic design. However, with the encouragement of career development professionals, educators and some certification associations, portfolios are increasingly being used by engineers, project managers, teachers, administrators and other professionals. In fact, high school students in Alberta are now required to create their own career portfolio.

To develop a portfolio, look for items that show you have the skills required in your field, such as certificates, awards, material you've written or created, letters of commendation, positive performance appraisals, articles by or about you, copies of presentations and publications, pictures or brochures about projects and accomplishments you've completed on your own or with others. You may also want to include a short, written narrative explaining what each item is and describing the skills or accomplishments it represents. Decide what best reflects your qualities and include it.

To organize and display your portfolio, you could use a:

- file folder with pockets
- binder with dividers and plastic sleeves to protect pages from spills and finger marks
- CD
- website
- video, DVD or personal website.

Take the time to do a professional job of organizing and displaying your samples. Your portfolio should illustrate your high work standards and create a good impression of your abilities.

If you work in a field such as the performing arts or broadcasting, consider creating a video of yourself. A video can be a very powerful marketing tool but preparing one can be time-consuming and expensive. Only you can decide if the potential benefit is worth the cost.

You can use your portfolio when you're networking or being interviewed. Let the employer know in advance if you're bringing your portfolio with you to an interview. It's best to bring your digital portfolio along on a CD or laptop. Most employers won't go to your website to view your portfolio unless they're already highly interested in you as a candidate.

Wait for an appropriate point in the interview to present your portfolio. Select the best and most recent examples of your most relevant skills. Tell stories associated with each item and emphasize the skills you used (e.g. problem-solving skills, communication skills). Use the STARS storytelling method described in Part One of this publication.

Practise using your portfolio by recording your stories to disc or tape or role-playing with supportive friends and relatives.

For more information about portfolios, visit **alis.alberta.ca/tips**. Under Tips by Topic, click on About Portfolios.

Proposals

You may meet or hear about an employer who's struggling with a problem that you're uniquely qualified to solve. If so, you may be able to create a work opportunity for yourself by submitting an unsolicited proposal.

Your proposal could take the form of a concise letter that includes the following information:

- background information such as a reference to previous discussions with the employer
- a short description of the challenge the employer faces and the desired outcomes
- some brief suggestions for a course of action
- your special qualifications (skills, experience) for the action you propose
- when you could begin and complete the project
- the fees and expenses you would charge
- when you'll contact the employer to follow up.

Be careful not to provide all the details of your proposed course of action. The employer could take your ideas and ask an employee or someone else to implement them.

An unsolicited proposal is less likely to be accepted than a solicited one. However, if you've discussed the situation with people from the organization and are sure they'd be receptive to a proposal, you may decide that the potential benefit is worth investing some of your time and energy.

Like a resumé and cover letter, a proposal is a marketing tool. Follow the same guidelines as you would for writing a cover letter.

If possible, deliver a printed proposal in person or by mail or courier. A faxed or emailed proposal may look less visually attractive. Enclose your business card and, if you have one, a brochure about your business.

Marketing yourself effectively

From resumés and references to business cards and proposals, you've fine-tuned your marketing tools. Here are some strategies to help you put those tools to work. (Some of these suggestions review concepts discussed in Part One.)

- Give a copy of your resumé or business card to everyone in your network. The more they know about you, the more effectively they can promote you.
- Identify employers that interest you.
- Set up information interviews with key decision-makers in the organizations that interest you most. Leave your resumé, business card and copies of relevant portfolio items with them.
- Resist the temptation to simply mail out a number of resumés. Target specific employers and deliver your resumé personally (which gives you the opportunity to look around and check out the organization) or email it with a cover letter expressing your interest and motivation. (Give your email a subject line that will ensure it's not mistaken for junk mail.) Include just enough information about your background to stimulate curiosity. Indicate when you'll follow-up with a phone call.
- Use your resumé to acquire a volunteer position that will give you experience in a skill area you'd like to develop.
- If there's an established professional association in your field, join it. Contact the association about job leads. Watch for leads on the website and in the newsletter. Consider posting your resumé on the association's website or placing an ad promoting your services and strengths. Expand your network by attending association and other professional meetings, lunches, conferences and activities. The more people you meet, the more likely you'll be to connect with someone who may be able to help you.
- If you're interested in working on a contract basis, develop a promotional brochure, flyer or website to introduce yourself to prospective customers and establish your credibility.

Thinking like your market, you've developed marketing tools that will help you present yourself effectively. Now it's time to get ready for the interview...

PART THREE: Preparing for the Interview

Part Three will help you through the next step in your work search—the job interview.

In a job interview, employers ask many questions that essentially boil down to the following:

- What do you have to offer?
- Why do you want this job?

Part Three will help you demonstrate your value in an interview by:

- gathering information
- knowing what to expect
- presenting yourself well
- negotiating job offers.

Gathering information

Studies confirm that applicants who take the time to find out something about the employer are more likely to get the job. The more you know about an organization, the more confident you'll feel going into an interview because you'll be sure that you're a good fit for the position. You'll be able to answer the employer's questions professionally and thoroughly.

The information and exercises in the section **Finding work opportunities and the employers you'd like to work for** (Part One) take you through the process of researching prospective employers. The following list reviews those earlier suggestions:

- Visit and explore the employer's website. Use an Internet search engine to find other information about the organization.
- Larger organizations often have public affairs or communications departments that distribute information about the organization (for example, information about programs, services, financial situation and contributions to the community). Phone and ask for copies of this information or pick it up in person.
- Visit the organization. Check out the location and the products and services. Talk with the receptionist or speak with another employee who may be willing to answer questions. Noticing how people are dressed will help you decide what to wear to your interview.
- Check out the feel of an organization by becoming a customer yourself. Are the staff helpful? Do they smile and interact or keep their heads down and their doors closed?
- Human resources staff at an organization can be a valuable source of information about job descriptions, salary ranges and the organization's philosophy, goals and values.
- Talk to the staff at your local public library or Employment and Immigration service centre. Explain that you're preparing for an interview and would like as much recent information about an organization as possible. Staff may be able to direct you to both online and print resources such as the organization's annual report or other sources of information (for example, magazine or news articles). To find the nearest service centre, call the Career Information Hotline. See **Helpful Resources** for contact information.

- Ask the people in your network what they know about the organization.
- Set up an information interview with someone who works for the organization.
- Contact your local chamber of commerce for information about the organization.

An interviewer may ask what you've done to prepare for the interview, knowing that your answer reveals your:

- interest in the position
- motivation
- resourcefulness
- planning and research skills
- communication skills.

Doing your research will help you answer this question with the kind of detail and commitment that will make you stand out. It will also help you handle the many other questions that will be asked in the interview.

△ Presenting yourself well

Your skills and accomplishments are key aspects you'll be focusing on during an interview. However, how you present yourself—your appearance, your attitude, your body language and so on—is also vitally important. Research indicates that the decision to reject an applicant is made within the first three minutes of the interview. You won't get a second chance to create a good first impression!

You'll be able to present yourself in the best possible light during an interview when you understand how to:

- develop your professional image
- build your confidence
- project a positive attitude.

[Developing your professional image

Before you even speak, the image you project (your clothing, grooming, posture, facial expression, eye contact and handshake) creates an impact. Your visual presentation is responsible for more than half of the impression you make.

What to wear

When you're researching an employer, find out how people in the organization usually dress. Consider dropping by the company to get a feel for how employees are dressed or ask the person who calls to schedule the interview. As a general rule, aim to dress like the employees but one level higher.

Every workplace has a slightly different set of rules for appropriate attire. For example, a shirt and tie with slacks and a co-ordinated sport jacket may be very appropriate for a man in one organization but not in a more formal, image-conscious company where staff members are expected to wear suits. However, if you're applying for a service management position in an oilfield company, wearing a three piece suit may be inappropriate.

Your clothing's style, colour and fabric will affect the impression you make. Be conservative. Solid colours tend to be better than busy, bold prints for a job interview. Make sure that what you wear is in good condition, with clothes clean and pressed and shoes polished and in good repair. Use discretion with perfume, jewellery, makeup and other accessories. Being neat and well-groomed is important. If you're in doubt about the professionalism of your appearance, ask trusted friends, colleagues or mentors for feedback and advice.

By carefully choosing what you wear, you'll be saying to the employer, "I understand your culture. I belong. I fit in."

Your body language

Once you have the right look, make sure your body language supports a professional image too. Non-verbal communication speaks louder than words.

As part of your preparation, pay attention to other people's body language. When you're watching people in person or on television, take note of mannerisms that communicate what you'd like to say about yourself. Anticipate how an interviewer might interpret your mannerisms and ensure that your body is saying what you want to communicate. Try the following suggestions:

- Keep your head, shoulders and back erect. Walk with a sense of purpose to communicate energy and confidence. If you don't actually feel confident, pretending you do will have a positive influence on your body language.

- Show friendliness, interest and confidence in your facial expression. Smile and make direct eye contact. In Canada, lack of eye contact is often interpreted as lack of honesty or lack of confidence.
- Learn how to shake hands if this skill isn't already a part of your social behaviour. Take the initiative and extend your hand without waiting for the interviewer to do so. A professional, friendly handshake shows confidence, breaks down barriers and initiates bonding. See the tip **To shake hands with confidence** in the section **Understanding typical types of interviews** for suggestions.
- In the interview, sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor, your hands in your lap or arms on the chair arms. This is an open position. It says that you're relaxed, confident and comfortable. If your hands or arms are crossed over your chest or stomach, you may be seen as defensive, hostile or closed-minded.
- Lean forward slightly to show interest.
- Use appropriate hand and arm gestures to add emphasis and credibility to what you're saying. Avoid overdoing your gestures.
- If you have a tendency to wiggle, fidget or play with anything you have in your hands, be aware and stop yourself. Practise and get feedback from a friend.
- If you're seated too far away, too close or where it's difficult to make eye contact with everyone on an interview panel, take the initiative and move your chair.

Your voice

Pay attention to the effect other people's voices have on you. What is it about the tone, speed and pitch of someone's voice that is or isn't appealing? Notice the characteristics you attribute to people based on their voices.

Unless you have a disability or an injury or illness that affects your vocal chords or your breath, you have the power to change the way you use your voice. Check the public library for resources that will help you learn how to develop your voice. Ask for feedback from friends, family members or a mentor about how you sound.

[Building your confidence

Showing confidence in an interview will help you create the kind of impression that lands jobs. To build your confidence and increase your sense of empowerment before an interview, develop a clear idea of what you want to say about yourself and what you want to learn about the company and the position.

To help you plan what you want to say, consider the following questions:

- What relevant knowledge, skills and abilities do you have to offer?
- How does your education and experience relate to the employer's needs?
- How well do the demands of the job and the nature of the organization meet your needs and wants?
- What's your track record for achieving results, contributing to successful outcomes and enhancing group effectiveness?

Writing out your answers to these questions and practising them out loud will significantly increase your potential for success. You'll be clear about your purpose and more confident as a result.

Use the following tips to help you manage any anxiety you have:

- Visualize yourself in the interview. Form a mental picture of who is in the room. See yourself looking poised, confident and relaxed and responding to questions with ease. Observe the positive reaction of the interviewers. This will help to reduce fear of the unknown and minimize negative thoughts and expectations.
- Just before going into an interview, breathe deeply and slowly to slow your heart rate and calm yourself so you can concentrate on what you want to say. While you're waiting to be called into the interview, sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor and your head erect. Take a deep breath and very slowly exhale through your mouth. Repeat three or more times.

- While deep breathing or immediately after, use positive affirmations like the following to maintain a positive, upbeat attitude:
  - I'm relaxed and confident.
  - I can handle anything that comes up in the interview.
  - I'm a good communicator.
  - I'm an ideal candidate for the job.
  - I have a great deal to offer this company.
  - I'm prepared.
  - I will learn from this process.
- Review and reaffirm several specific strengths you bring to the job.

TIP

Leave your baggage at the door

If you're carrying emotional baggage from your life experiences or past employment, deal with it before you get into the interview. Negativity in an interview can cost you the job.

Exercise: Projecting a positive attitude

Employers want to hire people who are positive, enthusiastic and flexible. Projecting a positive attitude can help you break through any preconceptions an employer may have about people who are your age or gender or who share your cultural heritage.

Interviewers are unlikely to acknowledge their preconceptions or prejudices. If you suspect you may be labelled with a stereotype, think about how interviewers may perceive you. You may be passed over for a job because you:

- are too young
- are too old
- are from a different culture or ethnic background
- are overweight
- are married and have young children
- are single
- are the wrong gender (they'd prefer to hire a person of the opposite sex)
- don't speak English fluently
- don't understand English well
- have a disability
- have a criminal record
- have had an attendance problem
- lost your last job
- are overqualified.

The following example shows how you could respond in this type of situation.

Example

An interviewer may perceive people with grey hair as:

- unable or unwilling to get along with younger workers or customers
- slow to learn new things and forgetful
- a greater risk for poor attendance due to ill health
- not really interested in working hard because they'll be eligible to retire soon.

Mature applicants could look for opportunities to counter the interviewer's preconceptions with positive information. They could point out that they:

- have friends and associates of all ages
- enjoy learning new things
- are healthy and energetic
- expect to continue working for a number of years.

Mature applicants could also provide evidence that they're reliable, dependable and hardworking. They could talk about the advantages of hiring an older, more experienced worker (for example, older workers are reliable, have a wealth of knowledge and expertise and bring balance, stability and maturity to the team).

What can you say to prospective employers to show you don't fit a stereotype? Using appropriate humour can sometimes help to reduce tension and prove your point.

What can you do to remove potential barriers to being hired? For example, you could dye your hair, exercise and stay healthy, have a back-up plan for when your children are sick so you don't have to miss work and deal with any personal issues, health problems or addictions.

Use the space provided to describe what you could say or do to project a positive attitude and help break through an employer's preconceptions:

For additional strategies to overcome potential barriers to being hired, visit **alis.alberta.ca/tips** and select Tips by Topic. Under Employment, choose About Resumés and Cover Letters.

? Knowing what to expect

Knowing in advance what to expect in an interview will go a long way towards reducing your anxiety. Use the information and suggestions in this section to help you:

- understand different types of interviews
- understand the interview process
- answer typical interview questions
- ask appropriate questions
- know your human rights.

TIP

Questions to ask when you get an interview

When you're contacted for an interview, try to find out as much information as possible from the person who contacts you. If that person is unable to answer your questions, ask for someone who can, such as a human resources supervisor or the hiring manager. You need to find out:

- the time of the interview
- the exact location of the interview: room number, floor, building and address
- directions, if you need them
- where to park
- what type of interview to expect
- names and positions of all the interviewers
- what tests or exercises, if any, you may be expected to complete and how to prepare for them
- what you should bring.

You can also use the opportunity to ask about the organization's dress code and to let the employer know if you're planning to bring your portfolio to the interview.

Understanding typical types of interviews

The type and number of interviews you'll take part in depends on the size, scope and culture of the employer or the position you apply for. Many employers will screen you on the basis of your cover letter and resumé and conduct one interview. Others may ask you to a series of interviews where you may meet with several different individuals or groups three or four times or more.

Screening interviews

The screening process starts with your resumé and cover letter. If you have shown you meet the criteria for the job, you typically move on to a screening interview of some kind, usually conducted by human resources staff. You may be screened by phone or in a face-to-face interview. You may also be screened:

- by writing a proficiency test, such as a skills assessment
- by taking part in a group interview, where several applicants are interviewed at the same time. Each person answers a question or stands up and makes a short statement about themselves.
- by computer. You log on to the organization's website to answer a series of multiple choice and short answer questions when you submit your application or resumé online. Some organizations use this technique to screen out applicants. In this case, the organization will only accept resumés or applications from those who meet the computer software's screening criteria.

Panel interviews

Panel interviews are conducted by a group of representatives from an organization. For example, interviews may be conducted by a combination of people from human resources and the area in which the successful candidate will work. In the not-for-profit sector, entire boards sometimes participate in the hiring process.

At the beginning of a panel interview, be sure you're seated where you can make eye contact with all panel members. If you know the names and positions of the interviewers ahead of time, you may be able to identify who you would be reporting to and who you would be working with if you were the successful candidate. It's difficult to catch everyone's name as you're introduced to a group of people. If you make the effort to find out their names beforehand and write them down, you're more likely to feel comfortable using the panel members' names during the interview.

Serial interviews

Serial interviews are common in larger organizations. If you succeed at one level, you're then referred to another individual or panel for the next stage. You might have several separate interviews. Some of these may take place in informal settings such as a restaurant. Another interview may involve a tour of a physical plant, for example, where you will be introduced to other staff. You'll be assessed throughout the process to determine how well you might fit in.

Video interviews

Employers sometimes conduct video interviews of applicants who live in another location. (Phone and conference call interviews are also used for the same purpose.) Some employers ask job seekers to respond to a list of questions on video before inviting them for a second interview in person. Or, employers may interview job seekers using video teleconferencing.

TIP

To shake hands with confidence

- Extend your hand and say, "Hello" or "Pleased to meet you."
- If you're being introduced to a third party by someone who states your full name, you don't need to repeat it. If your name is not given, add "I'm (your full name)" to your greeting.
- Firmly grip the full hand (not just the fingers) of the person you're greeting. Two pumps or shakes of the hand are standard.

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TIP

Eight tips for effective interviews

1. Stay positive. If you must refer to a negative situation from your past, such as a problem with a supervisor or an organization, describe the situation factually and in a positive way. You may also choose to describe how you'd handle the situation differently the next time. Never say anything negative about a person or an organization.
2. Stay calm. Be friendly and professional to everyone, including the person who greets you when you arrive.
3. Focus on your strengths. Make it easy for employers to see how your qualifications meet their needs.
4. Be honest but diplomatic.
5. Avoid bringing up personal issues and discussing controversial or sensitive topics.
6. Take your time responding to questions. Take a breath and think about your answer. If you don't understand a question, ask the interviewer to reframe it.
7. Send the employer a thank you note that emphasizes two or three reasons why you're a great candidate for the position, regardless of the outcome of the interview.
8. Assess and learn from your performance.

Understanding the interview process

Well-planned interviews are usually conducted in the following sequence:

- Interviews generally start with introductions, handshakes and some polite conversation to put everyone at ease. Interviewers judge your confidence level by how you meet and greet new people and handle new situations.
- If you're being interviewed by more than one person and you haven't been introduced to everyone present, ask politely for their names and their positions.
- Usually the interviewer will give you an idea of what will happen in the interview and how long it will be. The interviewer's role is to ask questions that will draw out as much information from you as possible. You should expect to do 80 per cent of the talking.
- The interviewer(s) will probably begin with general questions about your background and progress to more specific questions about your skills and experience.
- After the interviewer has asked his or her questions, you'll probably have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the job and organization. It's a good idea to take advantage of this opportunity. (See **Asking appropriate questions**.)
- To signal that the interview is nearly over, the interviewer might say, "Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?" At this point you may want to briefly summarize three or four key points to remind interviewers about the skills and knowledge you can bring to the position.
- The interviewer may ask you for your references. Have a copy ready to leave with them.
- The interviewer will likely close the interview with a cordial statement such as, "We appreciate your interest in the job (or organization) and thank you for coming to an interview. You can expect to hear from us by next Tuesday." If the interviewer doesn't offer this kind of information about the next step, ask when you might expect to hear about the hiring decision. Then thank the interviewer for the opportunity, shake hands again if it's appropriate and leave in a businesslike manner.

Before or after an interview, you may be asked to complete other recruitment requirements such as:

- submitting samples of your work
- presenting your driver's licence, submitting an abstract of your driving record or providing evidence of academic qualifications, professional memberships or licenses
- demonstrating job-related skills (for example, writing something based on supplied information)
- taking a test to evaluate your aptitude or technical expertise

- demonstrating your problem-solving skills by dealing with a hypothetical situation
- undergoing psychological or personality testing.

Any tests you're asked to take should be relevant to the job and administered to all applicants. Find out as much as possible about any tests and ask if it's possible to prepare for them.

Answering typical interview questions

You can likely anticipate the majority of questions you'll be asked. For example, you'll probably be asked questions about your:

- education, training, previous employment and volunteer or community activities
- career plans and how the position relates to them
- interest in the job and company
- strengths and weaknesses
- knowledge, skills and abilities
- expectations of your boss and the organization
- supervisory or management styles, if the job requires you to perform this function
- flexibility and adaptability
- availability to start work
- reasons for leaving previous employers
- reasons for pursuing particular goals, training or leisure activities
- salary background and expectations. If you don't know the salary range for the type of work you're applying for, check out **alis.alberta.ca/wageinfo**. Or, if you're being interviewed by a large organization, check with the human resources department.

Not all employers are good interviewers. If you encounter an employer who isn't, you may have to gently guide the conversation to make sure the employer realizes how your qualifications relate to the requirements.

"Tell me about yourself"

Interviewers consistently report that one of the toughest questions for most job seekers to answer well is "Tell me about yourself." Your response to this common interview question reveals a lot about:

- how well you deal with ambiguity
- your organizational and communication skills
- your ability to anticipate what the interviewer needs to know about you
- your ability to evaluate and summarize the most significant contributions you could make to the organization.

Resist the impulse to ask "What do you want to know?" in reply. Instead, respond as if the interviewer had asked, "How would you describe your background and how it has prepared you for this job?" That's really the question being asked.

Use your response to stimulate interest in you. Avoid making general statements about your background and assuming that experience equals demonstrated competence. Talk about the results you've achieved. See the example below.

Don't say
"Well, I have seven years of experience in accounting for oilfield supply companies, including supervising four clerical support staff for three years. My academic background includes a NAIT Business Administration diploma in accounting and I've completed the fourth level of CGA certification." Avoid repeating the information in your resumé.

Do say
"I've always been attracted to working with numbers and financial analysis. I started my post-secondary education by completing a NAIT Business Administration diploma, majoring in accounting. After I graduated, I applied to XYZ Oil Services and was chosen out of 48 applicants for the position of Office Manager. In the seven years I've been there, I've been given more responsibility and three promotions. I feel I've contributed significantly to the company's profitability. I've recently completed the fourth level CGA and will write the final in May."

Analysis
In the second response, the candidate offers relevant information about interests, motivation, ability to set goals and follow through, academic and job-related accomplishments, initiative, creativity, suitability for advancement and willingness to take on new challenges.

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Other tough questions

If you've identified your skills and accomplishments using the exercises in Part One, you have the information you need to answer the following tough interview questions:

- Why should we hire you?
- What would you bring to this job?
- Why do you want this job?
- Why do you want to leave your current job?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What did you like about your last job?
- What did you dislike?
- Tell us about a time when you didn't handle a situation well and what you learned from it.

Candidly answering questions about strengths and weaknesses may seem to go against the idea of marketing yourself. But weakness in this context means a job-related knowledge or skill deficiency—you're being asked to acknowledge that there are areas you need to develop.

One way to answer these questions is to identify a weakness that wouldn't be a problem in the position or to explain how you're working on or have improved your performance in a particular area. For example, if you're being interviewed for a supervisory position but have limited supervisory experience, don't say, "I've never supervised anyone." Instead, say something like "Although I have limited supervisory experience, I am enrolled in a supervisory development program and have had some leadership experience with a community organization."

TIP

Anticipate and practise

The best way to prepare for an interview is to anticipate what you'll be asked and develop and practise your responses:

- Write them down so you can see your answers on paper.
- Record them so you can listen to or watch yourself on tape, CD or video.
- Role-play with a friend or family member so they can give you feedback.

Each of these techniques will help assess your responses objectively and decide how you could improve. Record yourself as you practise to gauge how much you're improving. The time you spend practising will improve your interview skills and build your confidence—a great way to reduce your nervousness during the interview.

Hypothetical and behaviour descriptive questions

Some interview questions are more difficult to anticipate or prepare for. For example, an interviewer might ask how you'd handle a particular type of stressful situation (a hypothetical question) or ask you to describe how you handled a difficult experience at work (a behaviour-descriptive question). You response reveals information about what kind of situations you find stressful and how you cope with them.

Employers ask hypothetical and behaviour-descriptive questions to find out how you'd handle conditions you're likely to encounter on the job. For example, if the work sometimes requires dealing with disgruntled customers who may become verbally abusive, the employer needs to know how you'd react. The interviewer may ask what you would do in that situation or ask you to describe a situation in your last job that involved an angry customer. They may follow up with specific questions about how you handled the situation and what happened as a result of your actions.

Tips for handling hypothetical and behaviour-descriptive questions:

- Before an interview, analyze the information you've gathered about the employer and the work. Try to anticipate situations you might encounter on the job. Think about how you've handled similar situations in the past. Select situations in which your behaviour contributed to a positive outcome. Use the STARS storytelling method to develop brief descriptions of those situations. (See the exercise **Analyzing your accomplishments—STARS** in Part One and the tip **Using STARS** in this section for more details.)
- If you're caught off guard by a hypothetical question in an interview, think through your answer before you say anything. In order to be fair to all candidates, effective interviewers won't give you any clues as to what they think the right answer is. All you can do is answer honestly.
- When asked to describe situations you've actually experienced, limit your examples to those situations you handled well. Interviewers who ask behaviour-descriptive questions believe that how you reacted in the past is a good indication of how you'll react in the future. They may disregard anything you say about how you'd handle the situation differently next time.
- Don't make up an answer to a behaviour-descriptive question. The interviewer could follow up by asking detailed questions about the situation, what you did and what happened as a result. Always be honest. If you don't have work-related experience, describe a situation from a volunteer or community experience. If you have no experience relevant to the situation, describe how you would handle the situation.

TIP

Using STARS

The following example shows how a candidate uses STARS to answer the behavioural-descriptive prompt, "Tell us how you've handled a problem with a customer."

Situation: A disgruntled customer claimed the shipping department sent his shop the wrong parts.

Task: As the assistant manager, I had to determine if we were in error or if the customer had placed an incorrect order. This was a high-volume customer whose business was important to my organization.

Action: I called the customer immediately to assure him that I would investigate the situation myself. I checked all the details: his documents and our documents, our stock labelling system, the steps in the order-filling process. Sure enough, we'd made the mistake—a typo. But the root of the problem was in our parts-numbering system, where similar parts carried numbers that were too much alike and prone to this type of error.

Results: I called the customer to tell him the correct parts were being couriered to him overnight and that this order was on us. I assured him that we would make changes to ensure that the problem wouldn't happen again. Working with the warehouse and shipping managers, we implemented a new numbering system that has shortened our order response time by 15 per cent and reduced errors from an average of 11 to three per month.

Skills: I used my communication, analytical and teamwork skills to solve a particular problem for a customer and an overall problem for my organization.

To practise answering behaviour-descriptive questions, consider how you'd respond to the following prompts and questions:

- Please give us an example of a work situation where you had to deal with conflict, either with a customer or a co-worker. Tell us how you handled it.
- Describe a situation where a fellow worker or supervisor had expectations that you felt were unfair or unrealistic. How did you deal with that?
- Can you identify a work-related situation where you recognized a problem and initiated some action to correct the problem?
- Give us an example of some research you've done. How did you find specific resources? What were your findings and conclusions? What did you decide or recommend as a result of your research?
- Give us an example of a time when you conformed to a policy that you didn't agree with. What was your rationale?
- Can you describe a group situation where you were the only person with an opposing viewpoint? How did you handle it? What were the results?

If success on the job requires handling stressful situations calmly and effectively, an interviewer may actually try to provoke you to see how well you handle the situation. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by getting angry or letting your disappointment show if you think the interview is not going well. No matter what happens in an interview, remain calm, composed and confident—or at least try to look like you are.

[Asking appropriate questions

Towards the end of an interview, employers often ask if you have any questions about the organization or the job. If you say "no," which is what many applicants do, not only are you turning down an opportunity to position your product, you may also be sending the employer a negative message.

By having questions prepared, you show the employer that you:

- did your research
- are very interested in the company
- know what's important to you in an employee/employer relationship
- are confident and able to assert yourself appropriately.

Preface your questions by saying that the interview has provided you with valuable information and you'd like to ask some questions to clarify your understanding.

It's standard practice to bring a list of prepared questions with you or jot down questions that occur to you during the interview. When it's your turn to ask questions, quickly review your list and ask any questions that haven't already been answered.

For example, you may want to ask about:

- the key focus in the department at this time
- the first major project or challenge in this position
- major challenges facing the company
- working conditions—for example, what employees say they enjoy most about working for the organization
- the number of people you'd be working with or supervising
- reporting relationships
- travel requirements, if any
- what the organization values and looks for in employees
- performance measures and reviews
- the organization's policies regarding continuing education and career development.

Questions about salary, vacation, benefits and hours of work should be left until after you receive a job offer.

If you've researched the job so well you don't have any questions or you just can't think of any, you could say something like the following:

- "Well, I did have a few questions before I came in but you've covered them all during the interview."
- "Between the research I did beforehand and the helpful information you've provided today, I think I have a pretty good sense of the company, the job and your expectations. And I'm even more convinced I'm the person for the job!" Or, "I'm even more convinced that my skills and experience are a great match for the position requirements!"

[Knowing your human rights

Employers who are not well informed about human rights protection in Alberta under the *Human Rights Act* may ask inappropriate questions in an interview.

It's **acceptable** for potential employers to ask:

- about your ability to fulfill work-related requirements, such as your ability to work night shifts, travel or lift heavy items
- for any previous names you've held if the information is needed to complete reference checks or verify your past employment or education
- for your previous address if, for example, the job has a residency requirement
- if you're legally permitted to work in Alberta.

It's **unacceptable** for employers to ask for any information that could intentionally or inadvertently be used to discriminate against you, including information about gender, marital status, age, birthplace, ancestry or religious beliefs. For more information, check out *Human Rights and You: What Can Employers Ask?* at **alis.alberta.ca/tips**.

Handling inappropriate questions

There are several ways to respond if you're asked an inappropriate question in an interview:

- Politely refuse to answer the question. Tactfully let the employer know that the question is inappropriate.
- Answer the question and go on to discuss the underlying concern. For example, an employer who inappropriately asks about your family plans or the number of children you have might incorrectly assume you're more likely to be absent because of parental leave or sick time. In this case you could address the underlying concern by talking about your excellent attendance record and your ability to do the job. Bear in mind that interviewers may just be making polite conversation or may not be thinking about human rights legislation, so don't assume they're ignoring your rights.
- Respond only to the underlying concern.

However you choose to answer, be professional and diplomatic.

If you have a human rights complaint or a question about a specific situation, contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission. See the **Helpful Resources** section for contact information.

[Learning from the process

Effective job seekers stay open to what they can learn from the process. They continuously reflect on and evaluate the steps they take and the outcomes they experience. Learning from the process helps them to maintain both their perspective and their self-confidence.

Assessing interviews

Regardless of the outcome, do a self-evaluation following each interview. This step will help resist the urge to replay the event in your mind and second-guess yourself. It will also prepare you for the next interview.

Use the following suggestions to assess how you did:

- Write down as many questions as you can remember from the interview and how you answered them. If there were any questions you weren't prepared for, write down how you might answer similar questions next time.
- Make a note of any questions you wished you had asked and add them to your list for next time.
- Give yourself a pat on the back for the questions you handled well.
- Assess how well you emphasized the connection between what you have to offer and what the employer was looking for. What would you do differently next time?
- Assess your attitude throughout the interview. Did you keep your responses positive, polite and professional?

Remember that each interview offers you an opportunity to learn, improve your presentation and move toward the interview that lands you a job.

Many factors can contribute to an employer choosing a candidate other than you:

- Some employers are intimidated by a candidate who's a go-getter or has a dynamic personality.
- Employers who are set in their ways may be threatened by a candidate who questions how or why things are done in certain ways.
- Some employers take office dynamics into consideration and realize that certain staff wouldn't be compatible with a particular candidate.
- The successful candidate is a friend or relative of the employer.

Choosing the successful candidate is a business decision—don't take it personally!

Following up with employers by phone or email can provide useful information about the current labour market, other applicants you're competing with, the employer's needs and your interview skills. To approach employers for feedback, use the following suggestions:

- If your approach is professional and non-confrontational, employers may be willing to provide feedback about your interview performance. Be sure to phrase your request so employers understand that you're not asking them to defend their decisions.
- Ask if they'd be willing to comment on your performance, both what you did effectively and what you could improve.
- Listen carefully to their answers and remain objective. What you learn could greatly improve your chances of success next time. If you don't agree, don't argue—you're still being evaluated and you want to leave a favourable impression.
- Graciously thank employers for their feedback and, if appropriate, reinforce your interest in employment with the organization.
- Keep employers' names and contact information. You may be applying to them in the future. Meanwhile, they may be good contacts for your network.
- Ask employers if you could contact them again in a few months. Sometimes the successful candidate doesn't work out and the employer needs to hire again.

Employers usually find it difficult to select one person from among several well-qualified applicants. Often, they make their decision based on gut feelings or intuition about how the successful candidate will fit in and meet the organization's needs. That's why it's so important not to take the rejection you experience in your work search personally. Learn what you can from it and move on.

Negotiating job offers

After all the time, effort and care you put into your work search, it can be tempting to leap at the first job you're offered without negotiating salary, benefits and other terms of employment.

With the exception of some entry-level positions and jobs where you're automatically placed on a grid determined by education and experience, many employers expect you to make a counter offer and negotiate the terms.

To effectively negotiate a job offer, you need to:

- understand the offer
- know where you stand
- make a counter offer.

Understanding the offer

To understand the offer, you need to see it in writing. If the employer doesn't provide a written version of the offer, ask for one. Or take careful notes of the offer when it's made to you verbally, then describe it in detail in a letter or email to the employer and ask for confirmation.

Once you have the offer in writing, check it over to make sure you understand the terms, including:

- the employer's expectations (e.g. hours of work, shift work, overtime, travel, using your own vehicle or other equipment)
- salary and other benefits (e.g. vacation, health and dental benefits)
- any other conditions or terms (e.g. probationary periods, perks, employee wellness programs).

If any details are unclear, discuss them with the employer. Once you understand what you're being offered, the next step is to assess the offer in context.

[Knowing where you stand

To decide how to respond to the offer, you need to look at it in context. What are typical salaries, working conditions, terms and benefits in your industry and in your location? How does this offer compare? To get a feel for what's standard for a similar position in your area, check out the following sources:

- Visit the Alberta Occupational Profiles website at **alis.alberta.ca/occinfo** for information on more than 530 occupations, including projected growth.
- Visit the Alberta Wage and Salary Survey website at **alis.alberta.ca/wageinfo** for salary information by occupation, geographic area and industry group.
- Talk to your network, especially people who work in the same or similar occupational area.
- Visit job search and recruiting agency websites or look at career ads in newspapers and other publications to check out salaries and other terms offered for comparable positions.
- Ask your professional association, if applicable.

Next, analyze how you feel about the offer. Are you genuinely interested in the position or are you motivated by other concerns, such as conditions in your current job or the length of time you've been unemployed? What other opportunities are you considering and how strong are your prospects? Talk over the offer with your immediate family, trusted friends, a mentor or professional advisor.

Finally, look at the offer from the employer's point of view. How quickly does the company want to fill the position? How strong are your qualifications? Who else could they offer the position to?

If you feel that it's acceptable, agree to the offer. If, however, you feel that you need or can legitimately ask for more, be prepared to make a counter offer.

[Making a counter offer

To make a counter offer, use the following suggestions:

- Decide what you want and what you'll accept. Think about how and where you can compromise.
- Know why you're worth the additional salary, benefits or perks you're asking for. Know what's standard for your industry and area. Be prepared to demonstrate the strength of your qualifications.
- Write out and practise the terms of your counter offer. Practise statements like "This position looks exciting and I have great respect for the organization. I believe I have exactly the kinds of skills and strengths you're looking for. However, the salary offer is less than what I expected. I was thinking more in the range of [indicate the salary you want]."
- Ask if there's any flexibility in the offer. Suggest some possible compromises. For example, if the position requires more travel than you prefer, would the employer be open to balancing this requirement with letting you work from home on a regular basis? If salary isn't negotiable, would the employer consider increasing the amount of holiday time available?
- Be polite and professional. Approach the negotiation from a win-win perspective.

If you reach a verbal agreement with the employer, ask for confirmation in writing.

If you decide not to accept the offer or the response to your counter offer, let the employer know, then follow up with a letter thanking the employer for the offer. This keeps your options open for the future.

After accepting an offer

- Send your current employer a letter of resignation giving at least two weeks notice (or whatever is required by your contract). Be tactful, ask for a letter of recommendation and don't burn any bridges!
- Let your network and your references know your work search has been successful. Thank them again for their help.
- Withdraw any other applications or proposals you may have made to other employers and let them know that you've accepted an offer.

An interview and then a job offer—this is the final result of an effective work search, one that every job seeker looks forward to. After reading the information and completing the exercises in parts one, two and three of this publication, you know how much time and effort it takes to get this far. It's also important to maintain a positive attitude in the midst of the many challenges that go along with looking for work. Part Four offers suggestions that will help you stay positive and meet those challenges.

PART FOUR: Strategies for Success

Part Four will help you deal with the inevitable ups and downs of a work search by maintaining a positive attitude. Recognizing that your current transition is probably not your last, Part Four also helps you prepare for your next work search.

▲ Maintaining a positive attitude

When you're unemployed or unhappy in your current position, worried about money, anxious about how your qualifications measure up and afraid of rejection, you may sometimes find yourself struggling to maintain a positive attitude.

Your self-confidence is a vital element in your work search—employers want to hire people who believe in themselves. Yet nothing destroys your self-confidence faster than a descent into negativity, worry and fear.

This section looks at strategies for maintaining the positive attitude that will support your self-confidence. These suggestions will help you:

- recognize and change self-defeating thoughts
- take care of yourself
- prepare for your next work search.

[Recognizing and changing self-defeating thoughts

What you think about yourself affects both your expectations and behaviour. If you think you can't succeed (for example, "No one will hire me because I was fired" or "I'm too old/ too young/ not educated enough") you'll feel defeated by your negative thoughts before you even begin your work search and may act in ways that are likely to create negative results.

If any of the following thoughts seem familiar, consider the responses carefully.

I'll take any job I can get.
You're probably selling yourself short. You're a unique individual with many skills and interests. There are many things you can do. Which interests will lead to the most productive use of your skills and abilities? What type of work will satisfy you?

If you don't know what kind of work you're looking for, you risk taking jobs you don't like or aren't well-suited for. Targeting your work search is much more effective than widely distributing hundreds of resumés that aren't relevant to the employer or the position. If you're not sure what kind of work you want, take some time to review and complete the exercises in Part One of this publication.

I'm only qualified for one type of work.
If you think you're only qualified to work at what you're trained for or have done in the past, you may be unnecessarily limiting your options.

Stop thinking in terms of job titles and start thinking about your skills. For example, teachers have communication skills, organizational skills and leadership skills. Hairstylists must be skilled at making customers feel comfortable, marketing products, dealing with cash and working efficiently. These skills are required in many types of work, not just teaching and hairstyling.

To find out what skills you have that could transfer to other kinds of work, check out the section on **Identifying your skills** in Part One.

I have no idea what I want.
Try making a list of things you don't want to do. Then take each item on the list and rewrite it to state what you do want. For example, if you don't want to work shifts, say "I want to work regular weekday hours" or whatever is appropriate in your circumstances. See **Understanding your workplace preferences** in Part One.

There ought to be a test I can take that will tell me what I should do!
Most of us would like to find an easy way to bypass the self-assessment part of the work search. Unfortunately, self-assessment is not always that simple. Career and employment counsellors can help you explore possibilities. Career planning workshops and tools will help you understand yourself better. However, you know yourself best and only you can decide what type of work will:

- be interesting and meaningful for you
- pay well enough
- satisfy your other requirements (hours, location, benefits, organizational culture).

Part One of this publication includes a number of self-assessment exercises.

Recognizing the stages of job loss

If you've been laid off or fired, you may have to deal with a range of emotions before you're ready to begin a serious work search. Some people experience all of the following stages of job loss within hours, while others need more time to work through particular stages:

- **Denial.** At first, you may be in shock and act as though nothing has happened, particularly if you didn't expect to lose your job.
- **Anger.** You may blame yourself, your employer or someone else.
- **Bargaining.** You may try to reverse the situation by offering to take a pay cut or move to another position in the organization.
- **Depression.** You may grieve your job loss and lose your sense of perspective. Reach out and let your family and friends help you through this stage. Other people directly affected by your job loss may also be grieving and may need to talk about their fears too.
- **Acceptance.** You accept the fact that the job is gone and start gearing up for the work search ahead.

Coping with emotional highs and lows

Even if you haven't been laid off or fired, you'll likely experience emotional highs and lows as you progress through your work search. It's important to have realistic expectations. Prepare yourself emotionally and financially for a work search that could take six months or longer. You may find work sooner than that, but keeping your expectations reasonable will help you keep your emotions stable.

One of the best ways to cope with emotional highs and lows is to talk about your feelings. Don't shut out the people who care about you. Acknowledge and talk about your deepest emotions with people you trust. Keep a private journal and use it to write out your fears and frustrations.

If you reach the point where you feel you can't cope, talk to a professional counsellor. Reach out to organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (Alberta Division) at **www.cmha.ab.ca** to find the services you need.

If you're feeling discouraged about your work search, check out these information resources:

- *Change and Transitions*
- *Creating a New Future: The job-loss workbook*
- *Positive Works II*

You can get copies of these publications at any Alberta Employment and Immigration service centre, by calling the Career Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-661-3753 or 780-422-4266 in Edmonton or online at **alis.alberta.ca/publications**

[Taking care of yourself

Be good to yourself. Set yourself up for success. If you're unemployed, spend as much time each day on your work search (networking, researching, contacting employers, preparing your marketing tools and planning your strategies) as you would at work.

The harder and smarter you work at finding work, the sooner you'll succeed and the happier you'll be with what you find. Include people in your work search process who will help you keep progressing. See **Networking** and **Information interviewing** in Part One.

Work as efficiently and effectively as you can by:

- getting organized
- being creative
- being financially responsible
- handling rejection
- maintaining your energy.

Getting organized

Keep all of your work search papers in a set of file folders, an expanding file or a three-ring binder arranged in the following sections:

- information about you, your skills and accomplishments, such as the self-assessment exercises in this publication
- information about your market, such as news articles about organizations that interest you, magazine articles about employment trends, notes you jot down when you get an idea, job postings
- employer contact information and related notes, including names, phone numbers, dates contacted, outcomes and when to call back, as well as your **Contact tracking worksheet** from Part One
- your marketing tools, all versions of your resumé and cover letters and thank you letters or cards.

Organize a system to record your actions and monitor your progress. Being organized will help you feel more confident and professional. Most importantly, all the information you need to succeed in your work search will be at your fingertips.

Being financially responsible

If you're currently unemployed or soon will be, there are at least three reasons for dealing with any concerns you may have about money now:

1. Worrying about money drains energy you need for your work search.
2. If employers get the impression that you want to work for them only because you need the money, they probably won't hire you.
3. If you're worried about money, you're more likely to accept work you don't really want. If you don't like the work, you'll be looking for work again much sooner than you would otherwise.

Plan ahead so you aren't caught off guard by work search expenses. You'll need appropriate clothing and shoes, stationery supplies and funds for things such as transportation and postage.

Your work search could take months. Use the following suggestions to prepare for the unexpected:

- Take stock of all possible sources of income: severance pay, pension fund refunds, employment insurance (EI) and so on.
- If you're eligible, apply for EI immediately and fill out the forms carefully. Your first cheque will take several weeks to arrive and any problems with your forms will create a further delay.

- Consider ways to save or earn money over the short term. You could hold a garage sale, deliver newspapers or exchange services with friends and neighbours (for example, you babysit for others and they babysit for you).
- Keep track of your expenses and see if you can cut back anywhere. Look through your receipts and bank statements to figure out how much you're currently spending and on what.

If you owe money, discuss your situation with your bank manager or a financial counsellor. You may be able to consolidate your debts or negotiate smaller loan payments.

You'll find help with the budgeting process and cutting your expenses as well as other information in the publication *Stretch Your Dollars: Budgeting basics*, available online at **alis.alberta.ca/publications** or in print at Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres.

Handling rejection

It's not uncommon to experience rejection at some point in the process. Don't let rejection erode your confidence. Instead, use it to your advantage—take positive, appropriate action to learn from the experience. Analyze your work search tools and strategies and look for ways to improve. For example, rework your resumé or move your networking activities into high gear. If you're not sure how you can improve, gather feedback by:

- asking former colleagues, mentors, friends and family for feedback about your marketing tools and strategies
- talking to a career and employment counsellor at an Alberta Employment and Immigration service centre or to an Career Information Hotline advisor. See **Helpful Resources** for contact information.
- following up with employers.

[Maintaining your energy

Looking for work is hard work. It can take a lot of energy—mentally, emotionally and physically. Many people say it's one of the toughest things they've ever had to do. To maintain your positive attitude and renew your hope, remember to stop and smell the roses from time to time. Ask for support from friends and family members.

Reward yourself when you've worked hard. Do things that help to reduce your stress and increase your energy. There are plenty of inexpensive ways to reward yourself and maintain your momentum. Here are only a few of the possibilities:

- run, jog, lift weights or work out
- walk the dog
- go for a bike ride
- read a book, cover to cover
- watch a favorite movie
- do a crossword puzzle
- listen to your favorite music
- walk in a park
- visit a museum
- spend time with friends and family
- attend a free concert
- organize a pick-up game of hockey
- draw
- build something
- skate
- read cartoon books or comics
- dance
- do some gardening
- take a long bubble bath surrounded by candlelight and music.

✍ Preparing for your next work search

Chances are you'll probably change jobs several times over the course of your career.

Ironic as it sounds, the day you're hired is a good time to start preparing for your next work transition. Why? From day one at your new job, you'll be learning skills, gaining experience and meeting new people. You'll be developing yourself and expanding your opportunities. If you begin now to identify and nurture these opportunities and keep track of these changes, you'll be well prepared when you make your next transition.

Use the following suggestions to get started:

- Keep your resumé up to date.
- Maintain (or create) your portfolio.
- Stay in touch with the people who've helped and supported you.
- Build relationships with people who will mentor you.
- Take advantage of opportunities to develop and grow. For example, take part in professional development activities or volunteer for special assignments.
- Stay current with changes in your field.
- Become a valuable asset to your employer and your co-workers.
- Keep networking. Now that you've found work, become a resource for others who are currently looking for a job. Offer advice, information, referrals or support.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Alberta Employment and Immigration (AE&I)

Alberta Employment and Immigration provides programs and services to help people succeed in the changing workforce and foster safe and healthy workplaces. The department assists with health benefits, child support services and employment training support to Albertans in need. For more information visit **employment.alberta.ca**

AE&I's resources help Albertans make informed career, learning and employment decisions. Information about training, finding work and the labour market is available to Albertans by:

- contacting an AE&I call centre
- visiting the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website
- visiting an AE&I service centre.

AE&I call centres

Career Information Hotline

Call the Hotline for answers to your questions about:

- career planning
- educational planning
- occupations
- resumé review (including the e-Resumé Review service)
- labour market information
- work search skills
- the workplace.

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 toll-free
780-422-4266 in Edmonton

Email: hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca
Website: **alis.alberta.ca/hotline**

Alberta Works Contact Centre

Alberta Works helps unemployed people find and keep jobs, helps employers meet their need for skilled workers and helps Albertans with low incomes cover their basic costs of living.

Phone: 1-866-644-5135 toll-free
780-644-5135 in Edmonton
Website: **employment.alberta.ca**

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website

alis.alberta.ca

ALIS is Alberta's leading online source for career, learning and employment services and information. Here you'll find the resources you need for making the most of your future, including:

- Alberta Work Search Online—the latest information, examples, links and exercises to make the most of your work search online.
- OCCinfo—more than 530 occupational profiles, including projected growth
- WAGEinfo—information on wages and salaries by occupation, geographic area and industry group
- CERTinfo—answers to common questions about requirements and regulated occupations in Alberta

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- Tip Sheets—more than 145 career, learning and employment tip articles. You can search by keyword, topic and audience.
- a variety of career, learning and employment publications.

Alberta Employment and Immigration service centres

Come in to one of AE&I's service centres located throughout the province to find information on occupations, career options, finding work and education programs and funding. Many offices also have computers for Internet use and word processing, as well as phones and fax machines available to help you with your work search. You can also talk to a career and employment consultant. To locate an AE&I office near you, call the Career Information Hotline or visit the ALIS website at **alis.alberta.ca** (click on Career Services Near You).

International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)

IQAS can evaluate your international education and issue certificates comparing that education to educational standards in Canada.

Phone: 780-427-2655
Website: **immigration.alberta.ca/iqas**

Youth Connections

Youth Connections is a free service that connects motivated young people with businesses looking for employees who are seeking meaningful employment. The program is for:

- young Albertans, age 16 to 24, who are unemployed or underemployed, have left school early or have not continued on to post-secondary education.
- youth still in school who need help to prepare for a career.

Website: **employment.alberta.ca/youthconnections**

Other Government of Alberta resources

Programs & Services

Contact Programs & Services for general inquiries about Alberta government programs and services.

Phone: 310-0000 toll-free in Alberta
Website: **programs.gov.ab.ca**

Alberta Human Rights Commission

The Commission provides public information and education programs and helps Albertans resolve human rights complaints.

Red Deer north: 780-427-7661
South of Red Deer: 403-297-6571

Email: humanrights@gov.ab.ca
Website: **albertahumanrights.ab.ca**

Because of confidentiality concerns, the Commission cannot reply to complaints of discrimination by email.

Notes

[Feedback

WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU...

Advanced Techniques for Work Search

Date _____

Send your comments to the address or fax number provided at the bottom of this page:

What specific information in this publication did you find useful? How did it help you?

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Do you have any suggestions for other information or other publications that would be of value to you?

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Please return this form to
Career and Workplace Resources
Alberta Employment and Immigration

Mail: 12th Floor, South Tower, Capital Health Centre,
10030–107 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4
or

Fax: 780-422-5319

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Thinking about your future?

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Government of Alberta

Do you have full-time work experience, post-secondary education or a combination of both? Are you looking for a new job?

If so, *Advanced Techniques for Work Search* is for you! You'll learn how to identify your employability skills, update your resume and other work search tools and apply your skills to find the job that's right for you. Discover where to find labour market information and to access other work search resources.

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